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Cover picture by Philip Ross Norman

A good man and a perfect play

Gore Vidal

RICHARD ELLMANN
Oscar Wilde
632pp. Hamish Hamilton. £15.
0241 123925

Must one have a heart of stone to read *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* without laughing? (In life, practically no one ever gets to kill the thing he hates, much less loves.) And did not *De Profundis* plumb for all time the shallows of the most-reported love-affair of the past hundred years, rivalling even that of Wallis and David, its every nuance (O Bosie!) known to all, while trembling rosy lips yet form, over and over again, those doom-laden syllables *The Cadogan Hotel?* Oscar Wilde. Yet again. Why?

In *Four Dubliners* (1987), Richard Ellmann published essays on Yeats, Joyce, Wilde and Beckett. "These four", he admits, "make a strange consortium. Yet resemblances of which they were unaware, begin to appear." Certainly no one could detect these resemblances better than the late Professor Ellmann, who devoted much of a distinguished career to Joyce and Yeats. He tells us that at eighteen Yeats heard Wilde lecture, while Joyce, at twenty, met Yeats and called him too old. In 1928 young Beckett met Joyce and they became friends. . . . So much for the traffic; somewhat more to the point, "Wilde and Yeats reviewed each other's work with mutual regard, and sometimes exploited the same themes. Joyce memorialized Wilde as a heroic victim, and repeatedly quoted or referred to him in his writings later. Beckett was saturated in all their works. . . . Displaced, witty, complex, savage they companion [sic] each other." I wonder.

Since Ellmann had already written magisterial works on two of the four, symmetry and sympathy plainly drew him to a third; hence, this latest biography of Wilde; this last biography of Ellmann, our time's best academic biographer. Although Ellmann was unusually intelligent, a quality seldom found in academics or, indeed, on Parnassus itself, Wilde does not quite suit his schema or his talent. Aside from the fact that the Four Dubliners, as he acknowledges, "were chary of acknowledging their connection", I suspect that the controlling adjective here is "academic". To an academic of Ellmann's generation, explanation is all.

The problem with Wilde is that he does not

need explanation or interpretation. He needs only to be read, or listened to. He plays no word-games other than that must mechanical of verbal tricks, the paradox. When he rises to the sublime in poetry or prose there is so much purple all over the place that one longs for the clean as stringencies of Swinburne.

On those occasions when Wilde is true master, the inventor of a perfect play about nothing and everything, we don't need to have the jokes explained. One simply laughs; and wonders why no one else has ever been able to sustain for so long so flawlessly elegant a verbal riff. I would not like to rise in the academic world with a dissertation on Wilde's masterpiece and I suspect (but do not know) that hardly anyone has tried; particularly now that ever-easy Beckett's clamorous silences await, so temptingly, tenure-seekers.

All in all, Wilde provides little occasion for Ellmann's formidable critical apparatus. Where Ellmann showed us new ways of looking at Yeats and, above all, at Joyce, he can do nothing more with Wilde than fit him into a historical context and tell, yet again, the profane story so well known to those who read. Is this worth while? I am not so sure. Ellmann does straighten out earlier versions of the gospel – or bad news, I suppose one should say. He rises to the essential prurience; and it is interesting to know that at thirty-one, after a lifetime of vigorous heterosexuality which had given him not only two children but syphilis, Wilde was seduced by Robert Ross, then aged seventeen, at Oxford. It is also interesting to know that Wilde, unlike Byron, Chateaubriand and Lassie, was not into buggery, preferring either oral sex or the Dover-sole kiss cum interracial friction. What a one-time Warden of All Souls did for Lawrence, Ellmann now does for Wilde. Future generations will be in his – their – debt.

Future generations. Now, let us be relevant, the essential task of the irrelevant (O, Oscar!): will there be future generations? The British press of the Aids Eighties thinks not. According to the *Daily Mail*, the last man on earth died in 1986, clutching to his dehydrated bosom a portrait of Margaret Thatcher. According to the *New York Post* (an Australian newspaper whose editors are able to do simple sums), the human race will be dead by century's end due to rabid homos and drug-takers (mostly black and Hispanic and viciously opposed to prayer in America's caste book-less schools). Therefore, it is now necessary to trot out an Oscar Wilde suitable for our

anxious plague-ridden times. In the four decades since the Second World War, Wilde has gradually become more and more a victim-henry of a hypocritical society whose most deeply cherished superstitions about sex were to be violently shaken, first, by the war, where the principal secret of the warrior male lodge was experienced by millions on a global scale and, second, by Dr Alfred C. Kinsey, who reported that more than one-third of the triumphant Buick Republic's male population had participated in the tribal mysteries. The revolution in consciousness attributed to the Benites and other confusions of the 1960s actually took place in the 1940s: war and Kinsey, penicillin and the pill. As a result, Oscar Wilde ceased to be regarded as a criminal; he had been nothing worse than maladjusted to a society that was not worth adjusting to. Wilde himself became a symbol of mental if not of physical health: Ellmann pin-points the when and how of the syphilis that killed him when every orifice, suddenly, hugely, voided in a Paris hotel room. The cumulative effect of Ellmann's Wilde may suit altogether too well the Aids Eighties.

Currently, our rulers are tightening the screws; too much sexual freedom is bad for production and, even worse, for consumption. Sex is now worse than mere sin; it is murderous. In the selfish pursuit of happiness another may die. One can understand those paranoias who think that AIDS was deliberately cooked up in a laboratory, for the idea of plague is endlessly useful, transforming society-persecutor into society-protector: urine samples, blood tests there. Come along, Sick behind that fence. Keep moving.

Although Ellmann certainly did not set out to recast Wilde for our dismal age he was, like the rest of us, a part of the way we live now and his Wilde is more cautionary tale than martyr-story. There is the obligatory Freudianism. *Cherchez la mère* is indulged in, legitimately, I suppose. Jane Wilde, self-dubbed Speranza Francesca, was, if not larger than life, a good deal larger than average. A Protestant, Lady Wilde kept a literary salon rather than saloon in Dublin; favoured an independent Ireland; wrote thundering verse worthy of her son (ancient child-nurture: "Alas! The Fates are cruel. Behold Speranza making gruel"). She loved sensation-making; and came into her own at a treason trial in Dublin where she was gavelled down by the judge as she tried to make herself, rather than the defendant, the fount of sedition. Later, she endured the trial

for sedition, of her husband, Sir William, an oculist. Trials were, rather unanimously, her ice-cream. Son deeply admired mother and vice versa. But Ellmann controls himself: "How-ever accommodating it is to see a maternal smothering of masculinity as having contributed to [Oscar's] homosexuality there is reason to be skeptical."

Although Ellmann has not worked out that homosexuality is an adjective describing an act not a noun descriptive of a human being, he has been able to assemble data which he then tests against fashionable theory; in this case he finds theory wanting. Oscar was a brilliant creature neither more nor less "masculine" than anyone else. What he learned from his mother was not how to be a woman but the importance of being a Show-off and a Poet and a Questioner of whatever quo was currently stately. He also inherited her talent for bad poetry. In due course, he re-created himself as a celebrity (a terrible word that has been used in our sense since the mid-1800s) and he was well known long before he had actually done anything at all of note. The Anglo-Irish gift of the gab, combined with an actor's timing, made him noticeable at Oxford and unescapable in London's drawing-rooms during the 1880s. He invented a brand-new voice for himself (the Irish brogue, no matter how Merrion Squared, was dispensed with), and Beethoven reports on his "mezzo voice, uttering itself in lecherous fashion, with every variety of tone". He also took to gorgeous costumes that set off his large ungainly figure to splendid disadvantage. With the death of Sir William, he possessed a small inheritance, expensive tastes and no focused ambition other than poetry, a common disease of that day; also, as Yeats put it, "the enjoyment of his own spontaneity".

What is most interesting in Ellmann's account is the intellectual progress of Wilde. He is particularly good on Wilde's French connection, much of it unknown to me, though I once asked André Gide several searching questions about his friend, and Gide answered me at length. That was in 1948. I have now forgotten both questions and answers. But until I read Ellmann I did not know how well and for how long the two had known each other, and what an impression Wilde ("Creation began when we were born. It will end on the day you die") had made on Gide's tormented passage through that strait gate that leads the few to life.

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American child forty years later), Wilde became famous for writing as well as for slurring off, and Paris stirred, as it sometimes will, for an Anglo (the Celtic distinction is unknown there). With the publication of the dialogue "The Decay of Lying", Wilde took note of a change of direction in literature, and the French were both startled and delighted that the cultural wind was coming from the wrong side of the Channel. Ellmann writes:

In England decadence had always been tinged with self-mockery. By 1890 symbolism, not decadence, had the cry, as Wilde acknowledged in the Preface to *Dorian Gray*. "All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril." These aphorisms were a law to Stéphane Mallarmé, whom he had visited in February 1891, when he was writing the Preface.

Wilde then proceeded to conquer Parisian literary life in much the same way that he had the drawing-rooms of London and the lecture halls of the United States. Incidentally, Ellmann's list of the number of places where Wilde spoke is positively presidential. In hundreds of cities and towns he lectured on the Beautiful, with numerous household hints. In his two chairs "The House Beautiful" and "The Decorative Arts", he foreshadowed today's ubiquitous how-to-do-it books. He was a sensation. My twelve-year-old grandfather (during Reconstruction, Southern boys were bred early and often) recalled Wilde's performance (July 15, 1882) at the Opera House in Vicksburg, Mississippi: "He wore", and the old man's voice trembled, "a *giraffe*, and he held a flower in his hand." Happily, my grandfather never knew that two weeks later Wilde was received by General Grant. As I write these lines, I wonder how did he know that Wilde was wearing a giraffe?

The siege of Paris was swift; the victory total. Symbolism did not need to lay siege to Wilde; he surrendered to the modernist movement, now the world's oldest *vague*, whose long roar shows no sign of withdrawing. Wilde also appropriated Mallarmé's unfinished *Herodiade* for his own *Salomé*, written in French for Bernhardt. He did not get Bernhardt; but the play was admired. It is interesting just how learned the writers of the last century were: the educational system Greeked and Latinized them; other languages came easily to them; cultures, too. Today's writers know very little about anything. But then those who teach cannot be taught.

During the enchantment of Paris, Wilde himself was, significantly, overwhelmed by Huysmans's *A Rebours*, still a touchstone as late as the 1940s. The young Proust was impressive to Wilde because of his "enthusiasm for English literature, especially for Ruskin

(whom he translated) and George Eliot...". But when Proust invited him to dinner, Wilde arrived before Proust: "I looked at the drawing room and at the end of it were your parents, my courage failed me." Wilde departed, after the thoughtful observation to M and Mme Proust, "How ugly your house is."

With the lion cat-king, Edmond de Goncourt, Wilde was no less magisterial. In a newspaper piece, Goncourt had got all wrong Wilde's remarks about Swinburne, while Wilde himself was sneered at as "this individual of doubtful sex, with a ham-actor's language, and tall stories". Wilde chose to ignore the personal attack in a letter that set straight the gossip: "In Swinburne's work we meet for the first time the cry of flesh tormented by desire and memory, joy and remorse, fecundity and sterility. The English public, as usual

hypocritical, prudish and philistine, has not known how to find the art in the work of art: it has searched for the man in it." *Tiens*: as Henry James would write in his notebook. The biographer has licence to go hunting for the man; the critic not; the reader - why not just read what's written?

Wilde, the playwright, is duly recorded; duly celebrated. Ellmann has some nice green-room gossip for those who like that sort of thing. It is interesting to know that when Bernhardt's Tree addressed a "brilliant lady" on stage he did so with his back to the audience (a Bernhardt trick, too). But then when he had an epigram to launch, he would turn to face the audience, to their rapt attention. For those who like such things, there is also a very great deal about Wilde's love-affair with a boring beauty, called Bosie. At this late date, it is no

longer a story worth retelling; and if Ellmann has added anything new to it I did not notice. The trial. Prison. Exile. The usual. I suspect that one of the reasons we create fiction is to make sex exciting. The fictional meeting between Vautrin and Lucien de Rubempré at the coach-house is one of the most erotic ever recorded. But details of the real Oscar and Bosie in bed together or in combination with bits and pieces of England's adenoïdal trade, more gifted at blackmail than ganymedey, create for the reader neither tumescence nor moistness; rather, one's thoughts turn sombrely to laundry and to the brutal horror of life in a world without dry-cleaning.

Ellmann's literary criticism is better than his telling of the oft-told tale. He is particularly good on *Dorian Gray*, a book truly subversive of the society that produced it - and its author. He is interesting on Wilde's conversion to a kind of socialism. Of Wilde's essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism", Ellmann tells us that it "is based on the paradox that we must not waste energy in sympathizing with those who suffer needlessly, and that only socialism can free us to cultivate our personalities, charity is no use - the poor are right to be contemptuous of it, and right to steal rather than take alms". On the other hand, Wilde was wary of authoritarianism, so often socialism's common-law helpmeet. In the end, Wilde veered off into a kind of anarchy; and defined the enemy thus:

There are three sorts of despots. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the body. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the soul. There is the despot who tyrannizes over the soul and body alike. The first is called the Prince. The second is called the Pope. The third is called the People.

Joyce was impressed by this; and borrowed it for *Ulysses*. Inadvertently (I suspect), Richard Ellmann does make it clear that for all the disorder of Wilde's life he was never, in the Wordsworthian sense, "neglectful of the universal heart".

Yeats thought Wilde a man of action, like Byron, who had got waylaid by literature. When this was repeated to Wilde, he made an off-hand remark about the boredom of Parliament. But Yeats did sense in Wilde the energy of the actor: of one who acts, rather than one who simply, bemusedly *is*, the artist. But whatever Wilde might or might not have done and been, he was an extremely good man and his desire to subvert a supremely bad society was virtuous. Cardinal Newman, writing of their common day, said, "The age is so very sluggish that it will not hear you unless you bawl - you must first tread on its toes, and then apologize." But behaviour suitable for an ecclesiastical busybody is all wrong for Oscar Wilde, whose only mistake was to apologize for his good work and life.



Wilde in costume as Salomé, from the book reviewed here.

Angel in asbestos

E. S. Turner

NICOLA BEAUMAN
Cynthia Asquith
376pp. Hamish Hamilton. £15.95.
0241 123692
LADY CYNTHIA ASQUITH
The Diaries 1915-1918
529pp. Century/Hutchinson. Paperback.
£6.95.
0712617876

She was painted for love by Sargent and Augustus John; her face was on one of D. H. Lawrence's "obscene" nudes and there are facets of her in Lady Chatterley; she partly inspired Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway; she was drudge and confidante to Sir James Barrie; she was the "delighting angel" of Sir Desmond MacCarthy; and she was "all fire and air" to L. P. Hartley. As services to art and literature go, these may not be in the first rank; but Lady Cynthia Asquith was herself what the reference books call a "miscellaneous writer" of great versatility and she won posthumous fame, and notoriety, with her Great War diaries, which drove Randolph Churchill to call her "the greatest flirt that ever lived".

She was born the Hon Cynthia Chuteris, daughter of Lord Elcho, later Earl of Wemyss. Sometimes she wondered whether her real father was A. J. Balfour, her mother's close

friend. Most of her contemporaries, Nicola Beauman points out, were "potentially illegitimate", but it was still the tolerant custom of the aristocracy to absorb children of the mist quietly into the family brood.

Young Cynthia, though a believer in the superiority of males, especially those of the "Coterie", aspired in her own words to be "a free weed instead of a wired flower". Her father was dismissed when she fell for Herbert Asquith, the far-from-pushy second son of the Liberal Prime Minister. At the time the House of Lords was under heavy political attack, and "it was as if the daughter of a Tory peer wanted to marry the son of Arthur Scargill" (which is straining it a bit).

The First World War swept away the Coterie. When on leave Herbert Asquith sometimes acted strangely - "I believe the desire to smash is a recognized symptom of nervous strain from artillery work", said his wife (a libel on the noble ranks of Quinners). There were other possible reasons for strain, since Cynthia thought it vital "she should have the luxury of admirers - even in wartime, whereas Katharine [her sister-in-law, married to Raymond Asquith] felt that the least a wife could do for a soldier husband was to be faithful to him".

Not that the admirers got very far with this teasing, Pre-Raphaelite beauty. She balked them in the last run-up and the tick then was to retain their friendship. Once at least she was driven to reflect that "it's unkind playing with

fire when one knows one is dressed in asbestos oneself". Why she wore asbestos is a riddle to which her biographer diligently applies herself. Was it a shying from the sexuality which, as she well knew, led to such confusion of progeny? Whatever the reason, playing with fire still appealed. She who in courtship days with Herbert had taken a rug into Bedford Square now met Lord Basil Blackwood (later killed in action) in the summer-house in Cadogan Square. The devoted Lawrence, reined in by his "Hunwif", concentrated on putting Cynthia into one story after another and advising her on how to treat her retarded son.

A strange phase opened when, as "C. Greene" (the incorruptible), Cynthia became secretary to J. M. Barrie, who began spreading his suckers into the Asquith household as he had into the hapless Llewellyn Davies family. Herbert resented the *lits à trois*, but Barrie provided a useful income. By now "the child of the English aristocracy, hothouse reared for a great marriage" had become "a South Kensington literary lady living in relatively modest circumstances". She was not downhearted. In her late years we find her conducting American round great houses and even winning a lot prize on television by mugging up Jane Austen.

Nicola Beauman's research has been almost thorough. She tries to settle the muddled question of whether the man her mother had a fling with was really her father. The real

reasons why Lady Cynthia endured Barrie's ugly moods - plain loyalty, masochism, financial hope? - are anybody's guess. It is not easy for a biographer to limn a creature of fire and air, or to explain why a sharp tongue should have won so many friends.

First names and nicknames fall thickly. Lady Elcho is called Mary throughout, which leads to confusion. There is some jumping about in time. Several fascinating quotations go uncredited in the text, which means ferreting in the back to identify their authors. But these are small points; the book is a fair and accomplished study.

The reissued diaries have a brief foreword, written *con amore* by L. P. Hartley. No official name is given, the introduction goes unsigned and the unusually helpful - even loquacious - index is also anonymous. In turn delightful and heartless, the entries record endless "cuckooings" (settling in other people's houses), shopping forays undertaken as therapy, sittings to artists and testimonials to the diarist's beauty. She la brightly determined not to be soul-deadened by the war. There are minor mysteries. In June 1915 dinner guests were joking about the German corpses-in-soap-rumour ("I suggested", says Lady Cynthia, "that [Lord] Haldane should offer his body to Lloyd George" [then Munitions Minister]), yet the story was not publicly broken until April 1917. Evidently the best people got the best gossip two years ahead.

AND NOTEWORTHY

Shylock's Rights A HISTORY OF LOCKIAN DOCTRINE

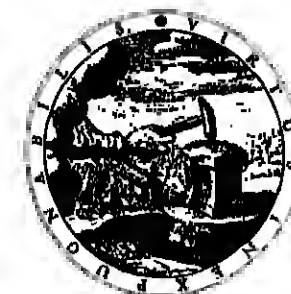
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Bad blood in Transylvania

Norman Stone

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9630542048
Volume Two: 1606-Tól 1830-ig
565pp. P.950.
9630542765
Volume Three: 1830-Tól Napjainkig
715pp. P.950.
963054329X
Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

On April 7 of this year, *The Times* carried a full-page advertisement denouncing *Erdélyi Történetek* (History of Transylvania) as "A Conscienceless Forgery of History under the Aegis of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences". It was placed, ostensibly, by someone with a post-box in Athens, but the heading, some of the language and (we may suppose) all of the inspiration came from Bucharest. In Romania, in March, a little pamphlet was published by "Academician Stefan Pascu" and others, in English, with the same title as *The Times* advertisement. Shortly before, President Ceausescu spoke to a congress of representatives of the national minorities in Romania, explaining why this book was being banned. What then is it all about?

Transylvania history is an old battleground between Budapest and Bucharest. The place has been Romanian only since 1918, with a brief and partial interruption in the Second World War, but it has a large Hungarian minority, now said to number 2 million, and for most of its history it was part of Hungarian civilization, where it occupies a special place. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Hungary was partitioned between the Habsburgs and the Turks, Transylvania became independent; for a brief, brilliant period it counted among the Great Powers of Protestant Europe, one of those little Protestant countries, like Sweden or Holland, that mysteriously shot into prominence and then mysteriously shut back again into provinciality. The list of Transylvanians who contributed to Hungarian civilization is long, quite out of proportion to their share of the population generally: János Bolyai, who first hit upon Relativity towards the end of the eighteenth century, is the best known, but there are many others, including several who eventually came to the West (Alexander Korda, for one).

Transylvania was divided among various peoples. The Hungarians accounted for most of the land-owners, but they never made up even half of the population, even at the time most favourable to them (in the late nineteenth century, when the country was ruled from Budapest). There was in modern times always a Romanian majority, overwhelmingly peasant and, until 1900, mainly illiterate; and there was a small German population as well, the "Saxons", whose ancestors had been invited in the thirteenth century to set up fortified towns on the confines of western Christendom. About 200,000 of their descendants still live in modern Transylvania, in towns whose centres are unmistakably Germanic. This being Central Europe, the complications did not stop there: There were other minorities - Armenians, Italians, Bulgarians, gypsies and Jews - and the religious picture was also varied. There were two Romanian Churches, Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox; there was a large Calvinist element (and a smaller Lutheran one) on the Hungarian side; the Germans were mainly Lutheran. As usually happened in the nineteenth century, the Protestants, with the Unitarians and Calvinists in the lead, promoted education, limited the size of their families and prospered out of all proportion to their numbers. The Calvinists had more high schools than all the other religions put together. They had an austere provincial pietism, and repented the ways of the popish aristocrats imposed on them by the Habsburgs. By 1900, many of them also resented the teeming Romanian masses, just as their counterparts in Belfast resented the Irish Catholics; two Hungarian Calvinist Counts, Bánffy and Beilken, made a name for themselves as oppressors, and the most prominent Calvinist statesman, Count István Tisza

(though not a Transylvanian), remarked that "the idea of a university education in Romania is a monstrosity". In Hungarian, the word *oláh*, "Wallachian" (from south-western Romania), became one of the nastiest insults in the language. The Romanians were seen as distinguished only by demography: "grandfathers by the time they are thirty", which this book claims to be the literal truth.

To judge from President Ceausescu's remarks, such attitudes have come alive again in the present Hungarian version of Transylvania's history. This is, in my opinion, a strange over-reaction. These three volumes are undeniably scholarly in approach; with an impeccable list of sources in various languages and a grasp of difficult techniques in archaeology or the interpretation of place-names. This is not surprising, since the editor-in-chief and the three editors of the separate volumes have names that carry conviction - in the case of Laszlo Makkai, the editor of Volume Two (1606-1830), great conviction. There is only one mistake in any field that I know - a misreading of the preface of a German diplomat as "Haldenhansen" rather than "Haldenhausen". I have doubts about the balance of the book; the later nineteenth century receives less space than it should, and there is too much military and diplomatic history in the seventeenth-century sections. The period after 1918 receives only superficial coverage (the authors saying in a preface that "for lack of details and evaluations" they could not manage more, except in cultural matters). But all in all this is a work that reflects credit on everyone concerned - not least, the people who chose the illustrations, which are splendid. I had no idea that the architecture of Transylvanian towns was so magnificent. They contain some of the best Jugendstil in the world.

Volume One ("From the Beginnings to 1606", edited by András Mócsy) takes up an old question, the origin of the Romanian population and its Latin language. In today's Romania, you are taught, as a matter of over-compensatory national pride, that the Romans conquered "Dacia" under Trajan, and Latinized it thoroughly before they left in 271 AD. Despite the many later barbarian invasions - Goths, Bulgars, Hungarians, Mongols, Turks - the Romanized population held on in Transylvania: in Academician Pascu's words, "an army of native inhabitants holding the plough in one hand and the sword in the other" held off all comers under various leaders including Dracula (who is only indirectly mentioned in this book). There are indeed Latin survivals among Transylvanian place-names, but they are very few, and apply mainly to the chief rivers - "Marisia" for "Maros", "Alutus" for "Alta" or "Olt", etc. It took four centuries for Britain to become partly Latinized, and more than that for Gaul and Spain to become completely Latinized; would Transylvania have been Latinized in 150 years? There is only one written source to suggest that there was a Romanian population in Transylvania when the Hungarians arrived at the end of the ninth century AD - an anonymous one, compiled more than two centuries after the event, and containing a short sentence to the effect that its author had encountered "Gelou, quidam blacus". "Blacus" might mean "Wallachian". But it might just mean "Latin Christian" - words for "Italy" and "Wallachia" being very similar in Hungarian (*olasz, oláh*) and for that matter in Polish (*Włochy, Włachy*). The first written references to a settled community of Romanians dates from well into the thirteenth century, and the last demonstrably Roman grave in Transylvania dates from the middle of the third century. When the Romans gave up Dacia, north of the Danube, they set up another "Dacia" south of the river, and here, with the Christianization of the Empire, Latin struck more powerful root. There are Roman place-names in abundance in Bulgaria and Serbia; and Serbian medieval documents talk of a nomadic, sheep-driving population speaking a Latin dialect (their descendants seem to survive in Greece, and perhaps also in Albania, as "Kutso-Vlach"). The suggestion can therefore plausibly be made that the Romanian ancestors came into Transylvania around the time of the Mongol invasion, in 1241, and then spread to the north. Page 301 of *Erdélyi Történetek* robustly states that "before the beginning of the thirteenth century, there is



The "turning dance" from the Székely region, Romania; a photograph from *The Art of Dance in Hungary*, edited by E. Kaposi and E. Pesovár (250pp. Budapest: Corvina, 936 13 7269).

no evidence - historical, archaeological, toponymic - for the existence of a Romanian population in Transylvania". The "aboriginal population" was Slav - all these place-names with "orosz" or "ros" show Russian, not Romanian, origins. There are also many traces of the Bulgarians, for instance, Brasov itself. Therefore, the original population of Transylvania is Slavonic not Latin and "it is as hill-shepherds that the Romanian immigrants are uniformly seen in the Hungarian sources". Some of the arguments used for this conclusion are speculative, but they are marshalled with verve and frequently carry conviction. The days when rival teams of nationalist historians dug skulls out of bogs, felt the bumps, pronounced them to be of this or that race and then claimed the whole region as their own have gone; and the Romanian historians' objections to this recent piece of scholarly investigation amount to a grotesque over-statement.

On other points, the Hungarian historians have behaved with fair-mindedness and common sense. True, here and there they may have their tongues in their cheeks: Tacitus is quoted as saying that the Dacians were thoroughly dishonest; the commander of the Romanian army in 1916 remarks that his troops are too enthusiastic about retreating; King Ferdinand observes that the Transylvanian brothers to be liberated treat his troops like "an enemy"; one of the first translators of the Bible into the Romanian vernacular in 1641 plainly hopes that his version will be universally understood, adding that "it is not my fault" if the language is still very primitive and split up into mutually incomprehensible dialects. There is a degree of silence about Romania's industrial achievements since 1945 and there is no echo of Academician Pascu's claim that "the national question has been finally and definitively solved". On the other hand, the Romanian contribution to Transylvania's history is set out at length, as is the Saxons' contribution. Hungarian chauvinism is forthrightly condemned for example, the chauvinism with which, in the later nineteenth century, the Hungarians' own liberal law on education of the linguistic minorities was circumvented. Episodes disgraceful to the Romanian side have been suppressed (a massacre of innocents in 1849/50, for instance), and Romanian intellectuals, writers of whom were pretentious asses, have been treated with more respect than they sometimes deserve (you are not told, for instance, that some were violently antisemitic).

In all of these great battles between nationalities, there is always a will to the war of re-

conciliation. Throughout the nineteenth century, a number of Irishmen sought common ground with an England which, at bottom, they rather liked; this was also true of many Czechs relations with the Germans. In Transylvania, between Romanians and Hungarians, the same sort of thing occurred surprisingly often. In 1867, when Hungary acquired virtually complete autonomy under the Habsburgs, only one prominent Romanian objected to Transylvania's union with Hungary - and he was a bad character, recently dismissed by the (Romanian) bishop as teacher of languages at the lycée in Balázsfalva (Blaj). A Romanian, George Bariț, was offered a ministerial post for education in the first Hungarian cabinet; even in 1916, when liberation beckoned, the Romanian deputies in Budapest and Vienna pronounced their loyalty to the Habsburgs. On the Hungarian side, there were always many people - at least up to the 1880s - who sympathized with the Romanians: a Hungarian governor allowed their cultural association, ASTRA, to use the National Theatre in Kolozsvár and, unlike some prominent Romanians who were quarrelling with each other, turned up to the first session, a song-competition. Many people, of all three nationalities, would happily have seen Transylvania become an eastern Switzerland rather than a parade-ground for bumps-in-skulls nationalism.

For Switzerland to come about, you have to avoid wars in the first place but you also have to have cantonal arrangements for separate nationalities. Here, of course, is the problem in Romania today: the rights of the Hungarian minority are being run down, in ways that have already attracted international attention (and an odd line-up at the Vienna conference on human rights last March, in which, for the first time to my knowledge, a Communist government, Hungary's, became associated with a non-Communist one, Canada's). It is possible to obtain a Hungarian university or high school education only in language and literature; the schools above infant-age are being phased out; all manner of historical artefacts have been knocked down, or, in the case of archives, transferred to Bucharest; the town-museum of Brasov, once Brasó and before that Kronstadt, is a grotesque travesty of the town's real history. Meanwhile, the sheep and darkness, is the one thing that has remained genuinely internationalist in present-day Romania. That darkness, to judge from the over-reaction of the Romanian Academy of Sciences to a scholarly work of high standard, goes far

A late-flowering rule-breaker

Igor Hájek

SUSANNA ROTH
Laule Einsamkeit und bitteres Glück: Zur poetischen Welt von Bohumil Hrabal's Prosa
276pp. Bern: Peter Lang. Paperback, \$38.65.
3261036516
BOHUMIL HRABAL
Proluky
191pp. Toronto: Sixty-Eight. \$C11.75.
088781 168 X

The Hrabal phenomenon is a bibliographer's and literary historian's dream - or nightmare. In the 1950s, while working first in a steel foundry and later in a waste-paper warehouse, Bohumil Hrabal, holder of a low degree, wrote some poetry and a lot of prose that deviated so much from the Stalinist canon (by completely ignoring it) that he felt it wiser to hide his work than to submit it to a publisher. Only when the Khrushchevite thaw at last touched Czechoslovakia in 1956 was a volume of his stories accepted for publication. The printers were slow. By the time the book was set and the proofs read two years later, the political climate had changed again and the set was dispersed. The budding author had to wait for his debut until 1963, by which time he was forty-nine. But there was no trace of middle-aged staidness in his writing. His first book, *Perlička na dně* (A Pearl at the Bottom), subtitled *History (Talks)*, was an immediate success. Like the five that followed until 1968, it provoked extraordinary reactions in both readers and critics, some ecstatic, others apoplectic. It was also during the 1960s, when the arts in Czechoslovakia flourished under a less restrictive régime, that Hrabal became known in the West, mainly because of the film based on his most conventional book, *Closely Observed Trains*. It was then believed that he belonged to the reform movement.

True, his work, devoid of any ideology, was not quite what the Party demanded of writers,

but despite clear sympathies for their efforts he had little in common with the liberalizers. Still, he had to pay a high price after the Prague Spring had been suppressed by Soviet tanks: in 1970 two of Hrabal's books (with print runs of 26,000 and 35,000 respectively) were pulped, and like dozens of his colleagues he was put under a publication ban.

Most of Hrabal's work published in the 1960s had been written during the previous decade and hardly anything was added in the hectic years of belated acknowledgment and popular success. Renewed ostracism paradoxically granted him the opportunity to concentrate again on literature. In the early 1970s new works started to circulate in typed copies either among friends of the author or as *smutná*, the most remarkable among them the "novel" *Obširhoval jsem anglického krále* (I Waited on the King of England). The ban was lifted in 1975 following an ambiguous interview published in the Party weekly *Tvorba* - which some of his admirers regarded as a moral compromise with the neo-Stalinists, motivated by an overwhelming desire to see his work in print.

The lifting of the ban was far from unconditioned, however. Versions of his books published officially in Prague in the late 1970s and in the 1980s differ conspicuously from the original typescripts. Comparisons can be made because throughout this period typed copies of his work continued to circulate in Czechoslovakia and some were printed (without a publisher's name) in the West. The disappearance or alteration of certain references to persons and events which could give rise to objection can be attributed to censorship, but there are other, more noticeable changes which suggest that the author himself had been rewriting his prose to make it acceptable for publication.

Not all of it. When the Prague Jazz Section, two of whose officials were recently sentenced to jail for just such activities, published a limited edition of *Obširhoval jsem anglického krále* for its members in 1982, it did not differ from the known manuscript. But there was

nevertheless trouble with the secret police, who made the author sign a Kafkaesque statement that the book - for which he had written a special preface - was published without his knowledge.

The sorting out of the textual chaos of manuscripts, typed copies, *smutná* editions, official publications and editions printed in the West, is only one by-product of Susanna Roth's *Laule Einsamkeit und bitteres Glück*, the first monograph in any language devoted to Hrabal. She also provides an outline of the writer's personal history, printing out with justification that structural analysis alone cannot do justice to a work shaped by external pressures, or to his idiosyncratic style.

Not that any method would help greatly where descriptive classification alone is a problem. Hrabal's short stories do not really have a beginning or an end; his characters are in fact figures wearing what Elias Canetti called "acoustic masks"; his dialogues are two parallel monologues linked by surrealist associations; his novels have no recognizable form and have been described as "liquid texts"; his style is made up of disparate elements culled from a variety of language arenas and levels even his grammar is occasionally questionable.

To deal with the grotesque blend of the trivial and the sublime in his prose, Roth introduces the term "confrontation", and in distinguishing among the many adaptations of a single theme she uses the terms "variation", "variant" and "version". Her argument is that rewriting has been germane to Hrabal's manner of literary collage right from the beginning, but while she disagrees with those who accuse him of mutilating his work for the sake of publication, she admits that the reasons for gross textual differences may sometimes have been extraneous.

A work not covered by Susanna Roth's study is Hrabal's three-volume autobiography, which he wrote between 1982 and 1985, and which brought about his most serious conflict with the authorities. Under pressure from the

secret police, Hrabal renounced his work and subsequently had a nervous breakdown.

The third part, *Proluky* (Vacant Sites) has now been published by 68 Publishers in Toronto and the other two are soon to follow. It spans the period from the publication of Hrabal's first book in 1963 to the mid-1970s. The narrator, surprisingly, is not the author, but his wife. This exquisite device has allowed him to be scathingly frank without embarrassment: seen through the sarcastic eyes of his wife, Hrabal appears as a tormented, frantic braggart addicted to the intoxicating flow of talk and beer; a clown playing up to the grimly serious Heinrich Böll on his visits to Prague; a wreck writhing in the agonies of hangovers and gallstone colics; a bundle of nerves sleepless with anxiety before a public appearance and living in terror of the secret police - and all the time pretending, faking and creating a zany, imaginative tale out of his life.

Mrs Hrabal's comments on the incomprehensible success of her husband's books which read like raw, half-finished notes towards something real and serious, contain the gist of his poetics. He has always claimed that he learned to write much as a gypsy acquires the skill of playing the violin. Indeed, there seems to be a touch of magic in the way he plays his instrument with total disregard for all the rules.

The wrath of the overseers of Czech literature had been aroused because in his autobiography he not only disregarded the rules concerning unmentionable names and events, but also dared to describe a police raid on a party to celebrate his sixtieth birthday. Yet earlier this year, under the influence of the fresh wind from Moscow, Bohumil Hrabal was, after fifteen years in semi-wilderness, offered membership of the "normalized" Writers' Union. With luck this will protect him from further harassment so that he can live out the remaining years of his restless life in the spirit of a saying of his beloved Uncle Pepin: "The world is maddeningly beautiful. Well, it isn't really, but that is how I see it."

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A radical and his mother

Derek McKay

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Joseph II
Volume One: In the shadow of Maria Theresa,
1740-1780
520pp. Cambridge University Press. £35.
0521 24210 1

At the start of the 1730s, the Austrian Habsburg monarchy seemed the arbiter of Europe. The Venetian ambassador gushed, "Not since Charles V has a prince of the House of Habsburg enjoyed such an imposing position of power as the current Emperor. The imperial house seems at its fullest bloom and the fame and glory of the Emperor at its height." Conquests from the Turks and Louis XIV's France had made the Emperor Charles VI ruler of a territorial giant, one almost as large as that of his sixteenth-century namesake. His lands in Central Europe stretched across modern Austria, Czechoslovakia and the plains of Hungary as far east as Romania's Transylvanian Alps, and even found room for large tracts of northern and central Yugoslavia. Added to these, but isolated by the territories of others, were Belgium and half of Italy.

Yet there was little substance in Habsburg power: the English, the Dutch and the German princes had promoted Austria to ruin the ascendancy of France. Once their support was withdrawn she would collapse from her internal weakness. While Charles VI was an admirable husband and father, he had few talents as a ruler. He did not try to weld together his sprawling empire, with its diverse traditions and constitutions, but ruled it through separate councils and ministers. His revenues were far too small to support an army capable of defending the monarchy and were voted and administered by the various Estates. These, dominated by the lay and clerical magnates,

were determined not to pay taxes themselves and to maintain the subjection of the peasantry. The labour services, rents and dues wrung from these serfs financed the baroque splendours of Central Europe.

Even before Charles VI died, disaster struck the monarchy. In the 1730s humiliating wars against France and Spain, and then against the Turks, lost him most of Italy and parts of the Balkans, including Belgrade. But worse was to come in 1740, at the accession of his daughter and heir, Maria Theresa, then in her early twenties. Encouraged by the successful surprise attack of Frederick the Great of Prussia, ruler of a country hardly larger than one of Maria Theresa's provinces, a coalition gathered round France and tried to tear the monarchy apart in the War of the Austrian Succession. Although Maria Theresa lost her richest province of Silesia and more of Italy, she survived, and her husband, Francis Stephen, was elected emperor. British subsidies, and the timidity and ineptness of her enemies, got some way to explain her survival. But so do her courage, ability to inspire affection and loyalty, sheer hard work and her obstinacy in holding on to her "God-given" rights. These traits, together with the Empress's warm and expansive appearance, an eighteenth-century earth-mother with a large brood of children, have made her the most popular of Habsburg rulers.

Maria Theresa had grasped quickly enough why she had been in such a wretched position, "without money, credit or army", at her father's death: the provinces and the noble-dominated Estates effectively ruled themselves, and her ministers, fellow magnates, obstructed change. Together with one minister, Haugwitz, she managed just after the war of the Austrian Succession to impose, almost in the form of a *coup d'état*, the kind of reforms in the central and local administration of Austria and Bohemia which her Prussian enemies had been adopting for a century. These reforms were anti-magnate in effect and subjected them to some taxation, but they had been forced on the Crown as "desperate expedients provoked by the justified fear of total political collapse". They produced enough cash not only to create a standing army to resist Prussia militarily, but also to allow the Crown for the first time to build on a scale more lavish than that afforded by its own subjects.

P.G.M. Dickson's imposing account of these

reforms, their limitations and their further development a decade later, after the Seven Years War, is a remarkable achievement: clearly, in language intelligible to the non-expert, he ranges over vast areas of the monarchy's administration, economy and society. The author continually mentions the imperfections of his data, which suffered from shoddy archivalists, the Vienna Juitiz-Palast fire of 1927 and the Second World War. None the less, Dr Dickson has managed to produce a welter of tables and relevant material - if only Haugwitz had had access to them! These important volumes will inevitably form the starting-point for any future work on eighteenth-century Austria.

Dickson shows that Haugwitz's administrative and financial reforms were only a prelude to repeated attempts in the 1760s and 70s to solve the monarchy's financial problems without alienating the nobility or extending more direct state control to Hungary and Belgium. "The legacy of the Seven Years War was... high debt-service and a large peacetime army budget." In a period when weak powers were carved up by stronger ones, standing armies were an inescapable fact of political life. Inevitably, the strain told most on those at the bottom of the pile, the peasantry. In Austria and Bohemia up to half their income went on taxes to the Crown and dues to their lords. To expand royal taxation and to ease the peasants' burden, obvious to all after famine and rebellion in Bohemia, feudal dues had to be limited or abolished. It was at this time that Maria Theresa's eldest son, Joseph, became emperor on the death of Francis Stephen in 1765.

Historians have never really liked Joseph II. Here was a ruler who emancipated the serfs, Protestants and Jews, who opened royal palaces to commoners, destroyed aristocratic privilege and abandoned the splendours of Schönbrunn for a modest suburban villa. Austrian Catholics condemned him for attacking the Church, liberals criticized his authoritarianism and supposed militarism, while Marxists smelt a rat in a revolutionary monarch, "the first Jacobin". The fiercest attacks have come from biographers of Maria Theresa: appalled at his bitter quarrels with his mother, when he ruled as co-regent, they even suppressed material favourable to him. But in Derek Beales's *Joseph II* we now have the first part of a life of the emperor which surpasses everything so far published in any language and is unlikely to be

bettered.

Having scoured a dozen archives and all the printed material, Professor Beales has begun to lay bare the real Joseph. Avoiding the stultifying day-after-day approach of so many biographers, he writes crisply and analytically, continually probing the evidence and changing the established picture. He is at his best in exploring the relationship between mother and son, particularly during the disputes in the 1760s and 70s over the direction of the monarchy's policies. Increasingly after the Seven Years War, and especially after the deaths of her husband and Haugwitz, Maria Theresa lost her early enthusiasm for centralizing policies and allowed the government to become indecisive and obsessed by detail. It was Joseph who argued, sometimes wildly, but more often "conscientiously, knowledgeably and rationally", for unitary measures, reform of serf-hold relations, "religious toleration, censorship relaxation and the wholesale dissolution of monasteries".

Beales suggests that Joseph achieved "notable changes in fiscal, military and ecclesiastical questions", but for the most part the emperor was ruthless in her resistance. She never allowed to shore power with Joseph, any more than she had with her husband. Manipulating and spying on her family, courtiers and ministers, playing on her son's emotions, she always kept the upper hand. Straightforward, loyal, lacking her ruthlessness, continually frustrated, and often at the edge of hysteria, Joseph had to find escape in incessant travelling through Europe. Although a proper assessment of this Enlightened Absolutist will have to wait for the second volume, it is already clear that Joseph was not an aggressive militarist.

Perhaps the most puzzling question to emerge so far is why Joseph became such a radical. His education had not been entrusted to advanced thinkers, as has been assumed, and there is little evidence that he read or met the philosophers. A gap in Professor Beales's work, which may well be filled in the second volume, is an explanation of Joseph's possible contacts with members of the Viennese *Aufklärung*. One recurring niggle about both these excellent studies is the perverse use of German place-names: it is now seventy years since Pressburg changed to Bratislava, Brünn to Brno, Ödenburg to Sopron and Hermanstadt to Sibiu.

Toil and taxes

Isabel de Madariaga

ARCADIUS KAHAN
The Plow, the Hammer and the Knot: An economic history of eighteenth-century Russia
399pp. University of Chicago Press. £35.25.
0226 42253 4

The late Arcadius Kahan made a name for himself as a historian of the eighteenth-century Russian economy with a couple of articles published some years ago. The book he was working on at the time of his death had been eagerly awaited, and it was with shock and sadness that scholars learned he was not to live to see it published. His colleague at the University of Chicago, Richard Hellie, has edited the completed chapters and supplied an introduction and a conclusion to what is a most welcome publication. The somewhat declaratory title is explained by the author: "The plow stands for the incessant toil of the Russian serfs, the hammer for the new elements of non-agricultural labour and the knot for the power wielded by the serf-owners or by the Russian state - most of the time by both." This dramatic emphasis does not really do justice to the breadth of Kahan's approach, nor to the care with which he refrains from generalizations unsupported by evidence.

For the first time we have an outline of the pre-industrial phase of Russian economic history, tentative still, as Kahan would have been the first to admit. In view of the patchiness of the evidence, but which approaches the subject with the tools of modern economic analysis, and free from ideological bias. The book deals

in separate chapters with population, agriculture, industry, foreign and domestic trade, transport, banking and credit, the fiscal system and, finally and rather skimpily, with the political order. In addition Kahan has supplied tables of statistical material with which he bolsters or expounds his conclusions, tables which will be invaluable to the non-Russian-speaking economic historians who wish to extend their coverage to include Russia.

Kahan's analysis takes as its starting-point the existence of serfdom and of a large number of non-economic constraints on the economic activity and social mobility of the bulk of the Russian population. Serfdom implied the lack of a free market in labour, and because of the way it was organized, the lack of a free market in land. A second specific feature of Russian economic life, which derived in great part from the serfdom of the peasant and the compulsory service of the landowner, was the role of the State as instigator of industrial and commercial developments designed in the first place to serve its military needs and only afterwards to satisfy consumer demand.

The discussion is conducted in objective, economic terms. Kahan seeks the economic motive in government policy, and prefers not to attribute policy decisions to theoretical considerations. He eschews idealistic interpretations, notably in his discussion of Peter's welfare measures in industry, characterized by the desire of the State to shift the burden to industry, and of industry to shift the burden to the State. He argues also that market forces played a greater role and over larger areas than even Soviet economic historians have usually accepted, and that both the economy and the government responded to these pressures. He

estimates that however heavy the tax burden, it did not exceed 12 to 15 per cent of the per capita income of the taxpayer, and he adds an interesting digression on the cost in money terms of the recruit levy. The non-specialist reader may be struck by the relative unimportance of furs in Russian trade - seemingly exported only to China - and the absence of any specific analysis of the role of the Old Believer communities, those standbys of the argument on religion and the rise of capitalism.

Contrary to the argument hitherto accepted, based on the standard work by P. Miluykov, Kahan claims that the poll tax introduced by Peter I in 1721 reduced the tax burden on the peasantry from the high level it had reached during the Northern War. Nevertheless, because the tax was introduced at a time of high grain prices and poor harvests, and collected by the brutal and licentious soldiery (for use by the armed forces), it remained in the collective memory of the peasants as a particularly heavy burden. In the parallel discussion of the introduction of the quit-rent on the State peasants, Kahan points out that revenue from this tax increased so much during the eighteenth century that by the 1780s it was twice as large as the revenue from the poll tax proper. It was this income which helped to make the government less dependent on the serf-owning class - a conclusion of considerable importance to the long-running debate on the extent to which the government was merely the tool of the nobility.

In spite of the shortage of capital, shortage of skills, enormous difficulties of transportation and poor climate, Kahan sees a steady quickening of the tempo of economic life in eighteenth-century Russia. He rejects the sug-

gestion of a decline in agricultural production ("The peasants were getting poorer and poorer") since, on the contrary, increasing production for the market led to an increase in the sown area and in productivity, followed by income differentiation within the village. Domestic trade became more active, while foreign trade, carried largely in non-Russian ships, benefited from the demand for Russian produce (iron and naval stores) consequent on the constant wars of the eighteenth century.

Politics, however, states Kahan, was slow in catching up with economic change. This is a somewhat obscure remark in the context of an eighteenth-century absolutist monarchy, but it underlines the curiously old-fashioned approach Kahan himself adopts to the politics of Imperial Russia. He shows little of the perceptiveness and the authority of his exposition of economic data. In his rare excursions into the structure of authority, his portrayal of the institutions of government is too firmly anchored in the Petrine period and does not really apply to the whole century, during which Russian society was held on a gradually lengthening leathery rein. Moreover, one might have expected some discussion of the impact on economic life of the reformed administrative and judicial systems of town and countryside of the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Yet Kahan does conclude, on an extremely just appreciation of the extent to which the social and political stability of eighteenth-century Russia was attributable to the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the government, not to oppressive police measures. As he puts it, "the knot was there, but more important was the belief that those who had it also had the right to wield it".

Adventures in the book trade

Eugen Weber

ROGER CHARTIER
Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime
370pp. Paris: Seuil. 149fr.
0200 9444 4
ROGER CHARTIER (Editor)
Les Usages de l'imprimé (XVe-XIXe siècles)
446pp. Paris: Fayard. 150fr.
2131 191761
HENRI-JEAN MARTIN
Le Livre français sous l'Ancien Régime
302pp. Paris: Promodis. 215fr.
29031 8157 8
MARTYN LYONS
Le Triomphe du livre: Une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIXe siècle
302pp. Paris: Promodis. 250fr.
29031 8158 6
GRAHAM KEITH BARNETT
Histoire des bibliothèques publiques en France de la Révolution à 1939
Translated by Thierry Lefèvre and Yves Sardat
489pp. Paris: Promodis. 310fr.
29031 8165 X

The new art of printing, as Guillaume Fichet said when he brought the first printers to Paris in 1470, came out of Germany like a Trojan horse. Half a century later, Gargantua wrote to Pantagruel that divine inspiration had caused printing to be invented as a counterpart to artillery, which had been instigated by the devil. The arts of peace were from the first entangled with those of war. Witness the Bohemian metallurgist, cited by Henri-Jean Martin in *Le Livre français sous l'Ancien Régime*, who, in the 1440s, taught the Avignonese an *ars scribendi* orificialiter, while his associate showed their Burgundian neighbours how to cast cannon.

Printing shops, too, were arsenals in their fashion; and contention divided the Gutenberg Galaxy from the first. Though most agreed with Gargantua (and Luther) that God lay behind it, not everyone was sure which human being was responsible for the new art. Was it Gutenberg who first hit on casting movable type, or a Dutchman from Haarlem, or a goldsmith fleeing the Hussite wars, or an Alsatian from Strasbourg whose servants revealed his secrets to Gutenberg, or Fust of Mainz, whom Erasmus first called Faust? By 1792 the case seemed closed when the French Legislative Assembly decided to search for Gutenberg's remains and place them in the newly dedicated Pantheon; but thirty years later, Haarlem still put up a statue to its native son, soon to be countered by rival erections in Strasbourg and Mainz. The war of attribution died down thereafter, but the history of printing continued to oscillate between bibliography and hagiography.

In the 1950s, Lucien Febvre enlisted Henri-Jean Martin, then a young librarian, in a new approach to the history of books and printing that went beyond bibliography and textual criticism to deal with printed matter as a part of industry, and the production and consumption of print as elements of more general economic and social activities. The works under review testify to the influence of Febvre and Martin's seminal *Apparition du livre*, and show how much we have learnt since its first publication, in 1938. All these authors place reading and writing in an economic, social and political context; all ask who read what, when, in what circumstances and in what fashion. Much of what they offer is highly specialized (like the essays collected in *Les Usages de l'imprimé*, edited by Roger Chartier), but no less fascinating for that, because their matter interweaves with other things to afford fuller views of fifteenth-century devotional activities, seventeenth-century political, nineteenth-century revolutionary or, quite simply, life since the Middle Ages.

How much can printing tell us about life? Well, take the way text is set on a page. We know that Greek and Roman texts were written on scrolls, which needed two hands to unroll; that codices not too different from our own books only appeared in the first century AD, and took hundreds of years to supplant the scroll. Like the wheelbarrow, whose introduction replaced one human load-bearer by a

wheel, the "book" permitted the freeing of one hand, henceforth available to follow the text, take notes, or scratch. But it did not change the way characters were written on its pages: in compact blocks, with no space separating words, no indentations, no punctuation-marks. Before Christ as after, reading was best done by following the text with one's finger, a method dominies taught until only recently. We assume that Cicero and his like dictated their texts, which were then left to professional readers to read out. Ancient texts, written - probably by scribes - to be heard, would be deciphered aloud (preferably by a professional reader), or in a murmur. Christian texts too would be read aloud, or ruminated *à solo voce*.

Did the reader of a text separate the words he read before manuscripts began to do so, somewhere between the ninth and eleventh centuries? One can only speculate about that, of course (our authors do not make clear how much that they advance is speculative), but the Middle Ages introduced new forms of visual presentation: letters became more legible, words began to separate, spaces and punctuation appeared - not to mention abbreviations. Hesitantly, between the High Middle Ages and the seventeenth century (how offensively we bestride the centuries!), texts came to be divided into chapters, volumes to be paginated and headed by a title-page, paragraphs, once merely marked by ¶ or its like, to be set apart by indentations.

Why? Martin suggests that, as Latin became less of a spoken language, scribes tried to make texts campiled in the sacred language more accessible. In their contributions to *Les Usages de l'imprimé*, Paul Saenger and Alain Boureau trace more intriguing itineraries. Boureau looks at hagiographic pamphlets - lives of saints which were mostly about their miracles and which, whether read, re-read, or merely handled, might reproduce the miracles they recounted. The object carries the supernatural power, transmits the miraculous efficacy, in which the text attests; leaf through it, apply tract or page to a sore spot, believe, and the magic works. Books of miracles can perform miracles, texts - manuscript or print - conserve as amulets to be carried or, at critical junctures, swallowed. This is not too surprising; but wait. Treasured on a par with relics, Boureau tells us, as late as the twelfth century, tracts of this sort would be spread abroad thereafter, in manuscript, then in print and, from the twelfth century, in the vernacular as well as Latin. They would be used to reinforce or publicize the claims of shrines, dynasties, localities and social groups - thaumaturgy in the service of publicity.

Chartier provides a similar interpretation of the popular theme he studies, that of the hanged victim miraculously saved by divine intervention: the Virgin rescues innocent maidens falsely accused, but also intervenes to save particularly devout thieves. If the Virgin's mercy appears indiscriminating, her power cannot be gainsaid, and popular accounts of the miracles she performed were not purely devotional. Chartier makes clear the political topicality and context of miracle tales; as Boureau makes clear the political and social uses of his medieval and early modern tracts. Edification and propaganda went hand in hand.

Saenger reveals another side of the coin when he examines diverse uses of the *lives d'heures* - portable primers that proliferated towards the end of the Middle Ages and tended to replace the more massive prayer-books. Produced on a fairly large scale even before the coming of print, increasingly adapted to specific moods, easy to carry, ready to hand, the genre was often treated as a talisman, protective and personal; but it also lent itself to private study and personal. So primers and prayer both became more private. Did the hen come first, or the egg? It is more than a coincidence that silent prayer, treated as an inferior genre before 1300, became the preferred orison thereafter; and that devotion, like reading, shifted from the mouth to the heart. New intimacies developed: between book and reader, between the worshipper and his God.

If few can tell about relations with God, relations with printed matter are less difficult to trace. After Febvre and Robert Mandrou, Martin and Chartier are among those who have done most to trace them. *Le Livre français sous*

l'Ancien Régime and *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime* reprint some of their more important articles, or chapters first published in the *Histoire de l'édition française*, which they edited together. Invention is the mother of necessity. Printing answered mounting demand, but also created never-production crises at times of economic recession. Martin shows how, in the seventeenth century, growing appetite for reading matter, among a public with less money to spend, left printers short of work, sharpened competition and lowered prices, along with the quality of printed products. Publishers and public both sought greater facility and easier reading. Material presentation suffered, heavy in-folios gave way to lesser formats, more people read more, more women passed from devotional reading to literature, more but shoddy books passed from study to bedroom and, in due course, to kitchen.

Exposure to print was never confined to the decorative section of society. Before they were relegated to inferior status, chapbooks and broadsheets were read by gentlemen and by their wives, and increasingly by shopkeepers, artisans, even some journeymen. One thing all these studies make clear is that the impact of print was less a matter of status than of place. Like religion and politics, writing was an urban product, print even more so. The fundamental cultural contrast lay not between upper and lower classes, but between country and town. Songs, images, posters and tracts were part of an urban experience that even illiterates shared. Read out aloud, illustrated by images, accessible to those who could not quite decipher its symbols, print appeared at their feasts, in their workshops, in the public places they frequented. Statistical evidence of literacy affords no measure of familiarity, for statistics, as Chartier reminds us, are not just untrustworthy, they are reductionist. They miss the essential, which is about how differently different "individuals and groups use forms and motifs they share with others". Relation to

writing is not, to most, a relation to books; but to bills, posters, images, *chansons*, even certificates of marriage, painfully deciphered by oneself or read aloud by others.

Moreover, people read more books than they owned, or owned books they did not read. And the taste of seventeenth-century élites was still close to that of the masses. Colbert (one of whose clerks was Charles Perault) paid story-tellers to help him relax. Houry, a bookseller protected by Louvois and godfather of a future Encyclopedist, launched a series of books on alchemy, occultism and healing recipes meant for and bought by aristocrats and magistrates. Yet, as reading and writing percolated through the social strata into provincial and even rural society (though hardly to the peasants), the literary and cultivated classes began to find traditional matter out of date or, rather, out of fashion. By the seventeenth century, manuals of civility, pioneered in the sixteenth century to domesticate and tame the groat, edified the upwardly mobile middle classes. By the eighteenth century they provided reading for charity schools.

So, prayers, canticles, legends, fables and biblical texts, guides for the dying and prodigies for the living, were increasingly abandoned in the lower orders and to pedlars. A private library was more than ever a mark of culture and a status symbol, bindings proclaimed conspicuous consumption, furniture catered to the storage, reading and display of books, garments like *kiseuses* followed the fad, ways of reading diversified (in the open, on a *berçère* or *chaise-longue*). Meanwhile, bookshops gradually closed themselves off from the street, turned into quasi-salons and mini-clubs, *librairies à choses* like that of Anatole France's father, which only went out as the nineteenth century ended.

Through all this, one has to bear in mind the low level of French book production (1,000 titles a year at the eighteenth century's end), with book buyers few, and sales limited. Martin shows that, apart from exceptional

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With whale and chicken

Robin Buss

PAUL GADENNE
Scènes dans le château
277pp. Arles: ActesSud. 130fr.
286869 (1110)

Paul Gadenne has always been recognized as an interesting talent, a somewhat tragic figure because of his long illness and periods of confinement in sanatoria up to his death in 1956, at the age of forty-nine. His major novels, *Silof*, *Le Vent noir* and *La Plage de Scheveningen* (all reissued four years ago), were first published between 1941 and 1952, but show a resolute lack of interest in the political circumstances of the time. They are not formally innovative, but have an almost mystical concern with the relationship between man and nature, which becomes the criterion for assessing relationships between men and women.

Scènes dans le château brings together thirteen stories and a number of other short writings. A story called "Baleine" is perhaps the most characteristic. The protagonists, two lovers, are drawn to the beached, decaying corpse of a white whale, first by curiosity, then wonder, until finally the creature becomes the gateway to a spiritual life which is imprecisely defined. "Je voulais être la baleine" is the only way Odile can find to explain the longing for a purer world that she has experienced in her perception of the creature's uniqueness and solitude. In essence, what she has to communicate is incommunicable: even as they try to share their feelings about the whale, the lovers find themselves drifting apart, and the certainty that everything important is beyond the reach of language is a recurrent theme in Gadenne's work. When the narrator has to explain to his friends, in an urban society of trams and tea-parties, how he and Odile have been spending their time, all he can say is that they have done "peu de chose . . . Nous avons été voir la baleine".

This same *peu de chose* might describe the experience of Monsieur Dumontel in "L'Inadvertance" when he goes for a walk in the mountains. A business man, Dumontel dislikes the countryside and is concerned only about a forthcoming deal, even while holidaying with his wife and children. Absorbed in his calculations,

he takes a stroll after lunch and wanders farther than he intended into a suddenly threatening environment. Gadenne plausibly conveys his growing sense of panic and the way in which previously familiar and apparently "tame" objects in nature become dangerous and deceptive in this transition from society to solitude. The ending at first appears conventionally reassuring. Monsieur Dumontel returns safely and, for the first time in many years, spontaneously embraces his wife. The point, however, is not that an unsettling experience has forced him to reconsider his scale of values. The experience cannot bring the couple closer, because it cannot be shared. When Émile asks what has happened to him, all he can say is that he got carried away: "Je me suis laissé entraîner . . . il faisait si beau!"

Sentimentality is not a temptation for Gadenne, though he does have a tendency to sketch characters who are little more than lay figures for his designs, of questioning the "real-

ity" of the social world to which they belong. Though his writing, when attempting to capture the "other realities" of the inner life, sometimes tends towards excessive lyricism, it is summary and austere in its treatment of more mundane matters. This collection, covering work from 1934 onwards, illustrates a variety of moods and themes. But even a piece like "Mes poules et moi", starting on a relatively light-hearted note with its ambiguous title and reflections about the woman on the ground floor with her hens, ends after only four pages by discovering in her obsession with these birds a form of universal wisdom, a possibility that mankind is superfluous, "que le monde est d'abord couvert de poules". The rub is that "as soon as, instead of living something, you express it, it ceases to belong to reality", as Gadenne wrote in *Silof*. What makes him, after all, a writer of his time and of interest to ours, is this acknowledgement of the nature and problem of language.

Family fun

David Coward

FÉLICIEN MARCEAU
Les Passions partagées
308pp. Paris: Gallimard. 90fr.

In 1928, Cédric de Saint-Danien, scion of one of those French aristocratic families which have been marrying into the wealthy middle classes since the seventeenth century, weds Emmeline Ricou, daughter of one of those wealthy middle-class families which have been married into for exactly the same length of time. In so doing, Cédric and Emmeline become founding partners in a very readable dynastic novel which, as is sometimes the case with Félicien Marceau's fiction, never quite decides whether it wants to be a farce or serious social comment.

We are shown precisely how the Saint-Daniens, by a mixture of patrician arrogance and astute footwork, survive the 1930s, the Occupation and the perils of the post-war world with their attitudes and property intact. The rising generation, still tugging on the old influential family strings, acclimatizes rapidly to changing circumstances and proves once more that adaptation is the best part of survival. By 1970, their royalism is muted but their position is still secure. Yet social observations of this sort are consistently subverted by a succession of adventures which are played strictly for laughs. The tale of Cédric's escape from his German prisoner-of-war camp via Miss Fraulin (his children's repatriated nurse) and a distant Italian cousin (he has distant cousins everywhere, all occupying useful administra-

tive positions) is deftly done. Less successful is the mysterious Mania, who is billed variously as the mistress or perhaps the illegitimate daughter of Saint-Danien père, and who looms for a moment as a figure of fate before turning into Emmeline's staunchest supporter against the equally mysterious Matt - who reappears as a film-producer named Schmalzgang, with designs on Isabelle de Saint-Danien that are frustrated by dotty aunt Jeanne-Athénais.

The fun, if rather unplanned, is fast and furious, and everyone is allowed to play. Even Isabelle's brothers, forgotten for chapters on end, turn out to be satisfactorily ludicrous. Rodolphe, who as a boy threatened to go to bed, becomes a rather muscular clergyman while Guillaume (the wet one) makes large amounts of money out of his inventions, which include a throw-away motor car and an oil-stoning machine which he sells to the Americans. In fact, there is something here for everyone - intrigue, chorus-girls, political plotting in Franco's Spain, a spot or two of murder and even a smidgen of philosophy. The trouble with providing something for everyone is that the mixture is spread so thin that no one is really satisfied.

Les Passions partagées, if broken-backed and episodic, has pace, some good jokes, a snobbish regard for aristocratic savoir-faire, a few real questions about life and a memorable gallery of eccentrics. If, as Cédric believes, Switzerland's neutrality will go on being guaranteed because the world's best politicians all keep their ill-gotten fortunes there, then Marceau's readership too is secure: there is always a place for clever fun.

Theatre of passions

Kathryn Butler

FRANÇOISE SAGAN
Un Sang d'aquarelle
318pp. Paris: Gallimard. 89fr.

In *Un Sang d'aquarelle*, Françoise Sagan's interest in the complications of human relationships, which characterized her early novels, is transplanted into the theatre of passions of Vichy France. Constantin von Meck, a German-American film director, has mysteriously chosen to return to his native country, to contribute his talents to Goebbels and the Third Reich. As the German grip tightens on France, his previously successful attempts to save Jews are undermined by the denunciations of the self-protecting monarchist Rostek to the increasingly efficient SS. Von Meck must acknowledge the full horror of the war and his own powerlessness. The arrival of his American ex-wife, Wanda Blesien, who is to star in his latest film, clarifies his personal relationships - with her, with his gypsy protégé Romano, and with the starlet Maud Méral, the political commitment of those he loves helps him to perform a final act of heroism. In this novel Sagan brings together three different worlds where role-playing is essential to reveal their vulnerable, messy hidden

side. Within the highly stylized world of Nazi officialdom, there are vicious and hypocritical individuals, while the polish and sophistication of the salons mask their participants' fear of fundamental emotion and real human contact. On the film-set, the needs of the scenario and the acting, as well as of directional technique, enable von Meck to defer any commitment to the real world and provide Maud Méral with a "personality". The friction between these three milieus and the intimate relationships between the characters show up potentially fatal inconsistencies. The fragile worlds of salon and cinema crumble, while the true face of Nazi oppression is exposed.

In a recent interview, Sagan stated: "Je n'ai pas changé . . . mais je fais semblant." This semblance seems overdone in *Un Sang d'aquarelle*. The finely drawn characters of her earlier novels have been replaced by stereotypes: the jack-booted homosexual Nazi, the dumb starlet, the adventure-film director, the frustrated and plutonic ageing *monarque*. Sagan's youthful simplicity and consciousness are overshadowed by a coquetry of style and a labouring of structure. The text is peppered with lengthy flashbacks which conflict with the suspense. The subtle "petite musique" for which Françoise Sagan became famous is all but drowned by the historical baggage in *Un Sang d'aquarelle*.

Survivors of the Home Front

Richard Cobb

FRANCIS WYNDHAM
The Other Garden
106pp. Cape. £9.95.
0224024752

This small, compact novel, so swiftly paced - *l'ambour battant*, one is tempted to say, in response to the endearing display by many of its characters of lapsing into French ("that sort of behaviour is definitely *not* my *luxe de tête*") - so deftly told, often in a few brief strokes, is a gem. The author, who has already displayed a talent for evoking 1939 to 1945 in England, has rewarded us, in *The Other Garden*, with a closely observed, very private chronicle of the bored banality, the seediness of those dreadful years, as experienced on the "Home Front": waiting, forever waiting, mostly in queues, standing in overcrowded night trains that stop for hours in the middle of the black countryside, the frail consolations offered by the cinema (a timid link, too, with peacetime), the presence, but not an obtrusive one, of the Americans, the seedy comforts dispensed by NAAFI and municipal restaurants, the homeless architecture of Nissen huts, the shabby, ugly, makeshift modes of war: headscarves, turbans, frayed overcoats, piled-up hair-styles, cigarettes sold singly over the counters of pubs, the quirks and accidents and odd encounters of an emergency, the dull, dismal drudgery of the whole thing. The war in miniature: "the miniature is easier to contemplate than the immense", a statement of faith that should also be adopted by historians to guide them on their lonely way.

One relishes Francis Wyndham's extraordinary skill at detailed observation, often recruited as an auxiliary to the nuances of class: we are first introduced to the awful Sybil Demarest ("an old Huguenot family") "wearing a smart suit of heather-coloured tweed and a green felt pork-pie with a pheasant's feather stuck in the brim. . . . Fair warning, we know what to expect, and we get it. Poor Kay, Sybil's

daughter, has "a prematurely weatherbeaten appearance". She carries "a big, battered handbag . . . to which she clung as though for reassurance. . . . I found in her an attractive combination of the cosy and the strange." Of the Demarests' drawing-room, the narrator says: "I felt as if I had been left on an empty stage in a scene set to represent the lounge of a typically English country hotel". Of the Rochester, a rather louché, camp club in Mayfair: "there was a depressing smell of expensive hair oil, male sweat, and sewage". The reader comes away each time - well, perhaps not in the case of the Rochester, or its equivalent - with a sense of instant recognition.

Wyndham is good on class, especially the vague borderland between middle and upper-middle horsey, and not quite, and the lower reaches of the aristocracy. Goering, the fighting Sybil affirms, in her self-confident, emphatic, underlining voice, "is what used to be called a gentleman by birth. Which is more than can be said for Herr Hitler." The narrator's school-friend, Phibbs, is an expert on these subtle nuances; he informs his friend that Kay is "supposed to sleep with jockeys" (as it turns out, she has done; she also "goes to field" with labourers). There is the usual reference to "Stockbroker Surrey". But it was an inspired invention to have Lind Kay "selling hats in a Mayfair shop called Odile". So, too, is the name of Kay's horoscopist: Roy Hsima, who lives in Hove, and whose boy-friend, Ernest, is a waiter at the Ship Hotel in Brighton.

Kay's brother Sandy's favourite parlour-game, inventing married couples from football clubs - "Sir Aston and Lady Villa", "Sir Woolwich and Lady Arsenal" - seems perfectly to convey the lateness of a certain type of middle-class humour current in the late 1930s. Denis, a student at the Slade, first met at Oxford (where the school has been evacuated), is much funnier. Referring to his boy-friend and resident occasional servant, he puts on a posh voice: "Our Mavis is getting ever so independent these days".

There is something also very comforting about the contrasting parallelism between the public calendar of events - defeats, victories,

stalemate - and the private calendar of illness and convalescence. The narrator, born about 1924 (the same age, one suspects, as the author), first comes on the scene in 1937. The following year he entertains vague private hopes of the Munich Crisis: if it does result in war, perhaps he will not have to go back to his public school. The actual impact of the outbreak of war in September 1939 is muted, as if a long way off, in the Wiltshire village (not too far from Marlborough, where there is a cinema) in which much of the novel is set. By the spring of 1941, he is in the Home Guard, spending his nights guarding an airfield under construction. By June 1942, he is in his third term in a depleted and rather melancholy Oxford. Called up in the summer of 1943, he is Y-listed (the dream of every soldier, and one rarely fulfilled) and discharged by Christmas, 1944, "so eventful for the rest of the world", is spent slowly convalescing in "an atmosphere . . . of unnatural stasis sweetly prolonged". He celebrates his twenty-first birthday, now well on the way to recovery, in the summer of 1945, "halfway through that ambiguous period of fourteen weeks which separated VE Day from VJ Day": a neat way of putting the war, victory, and the post-war settlement in their proper place, thanks to the privacy of illness, and that his own recovery, and

that of Denis, the loss of Kay's beloved aunts, and the imminence of the death of poor, muddled, ill-used Kay herself - an obsessive "putter-off", but this time up against something that cannot be put off - emerge as of much greater portent than Yalta and Potsdam, as indeed they should.

Francis Wyndham has got his priorities right. This sad, low-key and occasionally immensely funny chronicle is about individuals, about the petty twists of chance and accident, about the awfulness of Kay's mother - awful, in a recognizable upper-middle-class way ("Go to the top") - so as to make her stupidity both completely convincing and quite familiar. So, though the book ends on a very melancholy note - Kay is going to die, her dog has disappeared for ever - it is also quietly reassuring. There have to be some victims, especially with so many people being killed everywhere, and one feels that Kay is a born loser; yet we leave both Denis and the unobtrusive, but observant narrator on the road to full recovery. Tuberculosis, checked in time, has enabled them to survive. Even Sandy, the only war hero in this discreet and mild account, written with a sort of jaded elegance, gets broke, which means, in his case, to fishing in a trout stream. One likes to read about survival, it is a form of sharing - one has survived oneself.

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Comforting the South

Roy Porter

WALKER PERCY
The Thimble Syndrome
372pp. Deutsch. £11.95.
0133 981438

With AIDS rampant, we are sure to be in for an epidemic of medical fiction, playing off illness, death and the doctors against the backdrop of doom and damnation. Walker Percy has not only got in early but has seemingly aimed at cornering the market in health hazards and scientific disasters: Three Mile Island, Nazi psychiatrists, paedophilia, euthanasia and much more medical malpractice episodes are all woven into his sprawling Louisiana yarn, which at its best rises to cool black comedy yet all too often sticks in television soap opera.

What is to be done about all the great modern evils – violence, crime, drugs, family collapse, sexually transmitted diseases? Dr Bob Comeaux and his medical enemies seek salvation in a water additive. What fluoridation did for tooth decay, heavy sodium will do for inner-city decay. "Operation Blue Boy" is seen-

ing, even illegal, but it works, and sodium-dosing turns half the State into happy regressives, socially dreile, sexually animalized – yet *idiot's savants* to boot. To these humanistic medicocrats, facing the water with the happiness pill is all very normally impeccable.

The hero of the novel, Tom More, a Catholic psychiatrist and a drunk, gets wind of these surreptitious goings-on when he finds he no longer has any depressive patients to treat. He tracks down the conspirators, and the ensuing showdown sparks off the debate which is at the core of Percy's moral comedy. Is the sodium fix for society's ills truly the jewel of the curing profession? Or is it – as claims Futler Smith, a mad priest who lives on top of a tower, like a latter-day St Ignace – yet another diabolical cure of man playing God? Is the much-trumpeted tenderness of the doctors simply the new Terror, the road to the gas chambers?

Facing medicine mind and medicine mad, Percy lobs the dice and produces high farce. Van Dorn, Comeaux's assistant, proves to be a eugenicist paedophile maniac straight out of the Third Reich. Caught red-handed in the school he has set up to train future Olympic champions, he is made to drink his own heavy sodium, and literally goes apoplectic; eventually he recovers, thanks to rehabilitation with a ther-

apeutic gonilla named Eve. But these moments of Swiftian savagery are too few. Dr Comeaux proves in the end to be no Strangelove, no medical messiah, but just a small-time smart-talker, into "helping folks", happy to bow out with a smile and peddle contraception to the Chinese. And so the Brave New World loses by default, outwitted by a soak of a shrink, a sinner of a saint, and the quaint of ways of the Deep South. In the long run, Yankee Comeaux and neo-Nazi Van Dorn can't change the South because nothing can.

There is much quiet pleasure to be had from Percy's spoof on the South, his affectionately mocking evocation of the mysterious ways of Louisiana folk. Yet his plot line often falls slack; and all too often it seems as if his only method of characterization is to serve up a capsule life-history. What is worse, the charm of having a free-wheeling Freudian for a raconteur falls victim ultimately in the law of diminishing returns. Analysis interminable was the old Freudian joke; interminable narration is more of an ordeal. St Thomas More's crime was that he held his tongue; our Tom More won't stop talking. Walker Percy has conceived an entertaining moral fable of the doctor's dilemma; a pity he has wrapped it up in so much candy floss.

Prodigal son

Anthony Sattin

JOSEPH ROTH
Tarabas: A guest on earth
311pp. Chato and Windus. £11.95.
07011 32124

This is the latest in a series of republished Joseph Roth novels and, as with last year's offering, *Hotel Savoy*, is available for the first time in an English translation. *Tarabas* first appeared in German in 1935, after *Job and The Raderzky March*, Roth's best-known and most highly regarded works, and contains elements of both these novels, as the opening lines suggest: "In August of the year nineteen hundred and fourteen there lived in New York a young man named Nicholas Tarabas. By nationality he was Russian. He belonged to one of those races which at that time the Tsar ruled over..." The tone is immediately familiar, suggesting, as before, a knowing narrator and a known audience.

The narrator, although clearly present, does not introduce himself. His story, which has the aspect of a parable, concerns young Nicholas Tarabas, the prodigal son of a well-to-do family from a border state. He is tall and very powerful – "one of nature's soldiers" as he is later called – and is sent away to New York because of his radical politics. At a Coney Island fun fair he consults a fortune-teller, who predicts that he will be a murderer and a saint. One day soon after this, he gets drunk and picks a fight with the owner of a café, knocks him down and leaves him to die. The following morning war breaks out between Russia and Austria.

Tarabas, for all his strength of character and body, is acutely aware of signs and omens – nothing happens by chance. He enlists for the Tsar and flees to his homeland. The narrator encourages the reader to the more cynical view that, according to the law of averages, Tarabas is bound to go in the right direction some of the time. The war turns Tarabas into a man of action. When it is over, he is now too insensitive to appreciate the bad omen of his arrival at "the inn of 'The White Eagle'", the symbol of empire, run by the brilliantly sketched Jew, Kristianpoller.

Tarabas's downfall – the fulfilment of the prophecy? – takes place against a society in chaos after the war and the 1917 revolution. This has always been fertile ground for Roth. His hero attempts to ignore these changes. "History, chipping small new countries that men should live and die for off the big old ones which they had lived and died for until then – history was no concern of Tarabas." But history won't leave him alone, either, and he is in direct conflict with many of the things he wished to hide from. The outcome of the struggle is observed with remarkable clarity and scrupulously worked detail.

The novel is subtitled "A guest on earth", which is how a visitor to the White Eagle Inn describes Tarabas. The story considers what it is to be a guest, and how one should act towards the other guests on earth. Joseph Roth's a master story-teller, his "once upon a time" tone is seductively simple, and well maintained in the translation. His reputation as one of the most powerful and moving writers of the century should now be secure.

Whatever the impact of its jacket illustration (a photograph of a youngish Günter Grass), *Writers and Politics in West Germany* is broadly focused, its aim being "to offer an interpretative survey of the development of political writing in the Federal Republic". The offerings come in three stages: "Causes", a six-part chronological account of the ups and downs that have characterized the interaction between a range of more or less prominent literary and politically significant realities since 1945, domestic and international, which have culminated in Helmut Kohl's Germany; four "Case Studies" (Grass, Böll, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Martin Walser); and a brief and necessarily inconclusive "Conclusion".

The text is addressed to those who have no German – or French or Latin, for that matter – and, despite their presupposed interest in the scenes surveyed, virtually no knowledge of Germany either. Unfortunately, however, while it is a high time people realized that, say, *Brüder Eichmann* means "Brother Eichmann" and that Hölderlin was a poet, Kleist a dramatist, Jasper a philosopher and Erich Kästner someone whose writing was frequently humorous, such intelligence can crowd out data and analysis which are arguably more important in Parkes's chosen context. It is disappointing, for instance, to find in *Writers and*

Lydia Cunningham is an elderly widow who lives in the gatekeeper's lodge of the manor house – now a hotel – that once belonged to her husband. To her, for rest and recuperation after two marriages and a failed attempt to make a life in the States, comes her spunky, attractive daughter, Thelma, bringing a young man – an arsonist straight out of prison – whom she's picked up on a bus. Margaret Yorke's latest novel is hardly a crime story, though death enters into it. It's a delicate, brilliant analysis of family relationships, which probes into the past to reveal a surprising secret and give the story a surprising ending.

MARGARET YORKE
Evidence to Destroy
239pp. Hutchinson. £9.95.
0 09 168320 3

Crime file

Authentically active

Mary Fulbrook

CHRISTA WOLF
Die Dimension des Autors: Essays und Aufsätze, Reden und Gespräche 1959–1986
957pp. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. DM48.
3 472 86655 1

Christa Wolf, an East German born in 1929 in a town now in Poland, has obtained international stature as a writer. This recognition acknowledges not least her directness of approach, her "subjective authenticity", the "dimension of the author" referred to in the title of this book. In grappling with the specific problems of her generation, her society and her gender – the psychological effects of fascism, the development of socialism, the social roles of women – Wolf's writing reaches a much wider audience. This comprehensive collection of essays, speeches and conversations gathers together material – including some which has until now been relatively inaccessible and a few new pieces – permitting a sustained engagement with Wolf's reflections on a range of themes.

Wolf believes that the process of writing is in some ways more important than the product, allowing the author to work through and come to terms with the distortions and repressions of the past and the problems of the present; that good literature can heighten sensibilities in the reader; and that it can actively contribute to the humanization of social relationships and the building of a better society. More specifically, "subjective authenticity" does not mean any return to "subjectivism" or "bourgeois idealism"; Wolf argues that the achievements of socialist realism and Marxist socio-economic theories now permit the exploration of the inner workings of personality in an honest way, avoiding clichés.

For Wolf and her generation, a key question is that of the formation and channelling of personality under fascism. This exploration has relevance for the present, in that a whole generation has not yet adequately confronted, and emancipated itself from, a suppressed past. Wolf's reflections on the social conditioning of personality, the layers and levels of consciousness, the meaning of memory, as expressed in many of the pieces in this collection and as explored at length in her masterly novel, *Kindheitsmuster*, put into question the very notion of an unchanging "I", while yet endorsing

Mistrust of the masters

G. P. Butler

K. STUART PARKES
Writers and Politics in West Germany
251pp. Croom Helm. £22.50.
0 7069 4007 6

Whatever the impact of its jacket illustration (a photograph of a youngish Günter Grass), *Writers and Politics in West Germany* is broadly focused, its aim being "to offer an interpretative survey of the development of political writing in the Federal Republic". The offerings come in three stages: "Causes", a six-part chronological account of the ups and downs that have characterized the interaction between a range of more or less prominent literary and politically significant realities since 1945, domestic and international, which have culminated in Helmut Kohl's Germany; four "Case Studies" (Grass, Böll, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Martin Walser); and a brief and necessarily inconclusive "Conclusion".

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ing the existence of an inner self which – even when treated in the third person – can still stand back and insist "das nicht!". In her writings on these questions, Wolf develops a subtle and persuasive case on the complex interrelations between a developing self and social environment.

However compelling Wolf's views on these central themes which inform her work, certain inconsistencies appear. On the subject of gender, for example, she appears to be developing a less subtle form of biologism. From her insistence in the early 1970s that both women and men needed emancipation from the dehumanizing division of labour in industrial society – an insight only gained once women had achieved equal rights and opportunities and could then ask what it was that men actually did – Wolf now perceives intrinsic, persistent differences between male and female, and suggests that men have played the villains, suppressing women throughout most of western history (see the new piece on "Krankheit und Liebesentzug"). Similarly, there are inconsistencies in Wolf's reflections on her own society, Wolf – a committed socialist – insists that the deference to authority and the tendency to conform evident in the GDR is to some extent a legacy of fascism which must be worked through. Wolf appears to assume that heightened awareness can in itself help to overcome constraints. She does not directly confront the central question of whether the sociopolitical organization of the GDR itself serves to foster certain tendencies, and whether indeed – or under what conditions – socialism can combat the effects of bureaucratization and centralization on social relationships.

This collection is clearly organized, with a useful guide to original places and contexts of publication. Sadly, it lacks a critical introduction to Wolf's life and literary works. There is too a curious absence – despite the wealth of autobiographical material – of discussion of Wolf's political development. (She was a candidate member of the Central Committee of the communist party, the SED, from 1964–67; she admits to periods of greater and lesser tension for writers in the GDR, and herself ran into trouble for protesting against Biermann's expulsion in 1976.) Nevertheless, the book is an invaluable source; and, most importantly, the "subjective authenticity" of Wolf's voice, here as elsewhere, stimulates in the reader processes of increased awareness, questioning and change, as Wolf herself intends.

Politics in West Germany no more than a page devoted to "the mammoth two-volume project *Sichworte zur 'Geistigen Situation der Zeit'*" (Key Terms on the 'Intellectual Situation of the Age'), which was assembled by "the sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas" as No 1,000 of the edition *suhrkamp* (1979). Above all, it is disconcerting, in a study "concentrated on writers whose fame is based on their achievements in the sphere of literary fiction", to find that relatively little attention has been paid to the political attitudes reflected within those achievements. True, Parkes makes no bones about it: "Because they are more overtly political, manifestos, speeches, essays and the like have provided the major source material." And of course he adduces evidence, particularly in presenting his "cases", from much of the fiction that has shaped the political profiles in question: from Grass's *Aus dem Tagebuch einer Schnecke* and *Kopfgebühren*, for instance, and from Böll's *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum*. But readers would surely have been better served if, to take the example of Grass, the mixture of relevant messages in his major novels, from *Die Blechtrommel* to at least *Der Butt*, had been given its due.

Despite this, *Writers and Politics in West Germany* will, with luck, bring about a surge of further reading, even of re-reading. It will raise hackles, not least in response to flaws in its presentation. But for those now seeking an answer to at least one important query about West German life and letters, it is an ample starting-point: why were so many of those who feature in this survey, and in whose civic vigour and vigilance their country can justifiably take pride, described by a conservative Federal Chancellor in *spe*, as "rats and blowflies"?

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Richard Daveson, *New Statesman*

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Coping with Calcutta

Alan Ross

SARA BANERJI
The Wedding of Jayanthi Mandel
208pp. Gollancz. £10.95.
0 575 03984 1

It is forty years since the first publication of G. V. Desani's classic *All About H. Hatter*, whose language Anthony Burgess, in an introduction to its 1970 reissue, described as being "whole language, in which philosophical terms, the colloquialisms of Calcutta and London, Shakespearean archaisms, hazan whinings, quack spels, references to the Hindu pantheon, the jargon of Indian litigation, and shill habu irritability seethe together".

Desani's Hatter was a self-educated Anglo-Indian and spoke accordingly. There are no Anglo-Indians in Sara Banerji's novel, which is set in Calcutta; but her Mandel family – powerful Bengali business people, whose ramifications spread through every level of society – and most particularly Superintendent Babu, of the Calcutta police force, speak and think in an idiom not greatly removed from Hatter's. The novel opens with Babu instructing a constable to keep the traffic moving:

"Flow, so many times you have been told this! To keep the flow going is why you are seated here... The flow to which I referred was the traffic flow, and my reason for having to remind the fellow repeatedly was because he, instead of attending to his duties,

Indian summer

Raleigh Trevelyan

FRANCIS KING
Frozen Music
104pp. Century Hutchinson. £7.95.
0 19 170560 6

The chilly title of this beautifully constructed short novel, in its elegant binding and with illustrations by Patrick Procktor, conceals a story of torrid emotions in the plains of central India. Around 1960 an oddly assorted family trip sets out from England to visit the grave of Philip's long-dead first wife in a small town called Balmra, near Indore. Philip, an elderly ex-publisher and failed writer, kind and vague, has recently married an attractive and scrupulously efficient young Finnish woman, Kirsti, who nursed him after his prostate operation. *Frozen Music* is the title of the book on architecture he always meant to finish. That he should have wanted to embark on this quest with Kirsti, only four months after their marriage, is indeed surprising. They are accompanied by Philip's son Rupert, the narrator, a somewhat calculating individual recovering from a divorce and haunted by the memory

of his mother's death from tuberculosis. Their driver is Rajiv, at times loquacious, at times gloomy, pathetically humble about money, in contrast to the usual cries for *baksheesh* from beggars and the occasional palm-greasing that beset any traveller in India.

Francis King has always shown himself a master of conveying the undercurrents of half-truths and tentative expressions of love and irritation within a family. As in his previous novel with an Indian setting, *Act of Darkness*, there is a mystery, leading up to an unexpected climax. In this case the mystery, gradually peeled away, concerns the horror of Rupert's mother's death, which has a counterpart in the present, even affecting the attitude of Rajiv. The squalor and seediness of the new, industrialized India that has crept over and subverted the old British cemetery at Balmra comes as a shock after the romantic Lake Palace at Udaipur. Relentlessly we are treated to details such as curry steins on the pillow at the so-called Ritz Garden Hotel, a blocked lovatry bowl, and a woman wiping her nose with the hand that slices onions for the guests' dinner. Philip gradually and confusedly has to accept the reality of the fact that this spot where he might have liked to have been buried

(and what about Kirsti? Rupert wonders) has become hideous. He is taken ill, and Rupert and Kirsti are left alone to go off on their fatal drives around Balmra.

One of Francis King's typically sharp vignettes occurs in a hotel dining-room. Rupert hears a furious voice behind him: "What the hell's going on here? Do we have to wait all night?" That's a voice from my childhood, he thinks. He turns and sees that the speaker is not "some puffy, crimson-faced relic of the Raj, but a beautiful young Sikh, his curly beard in a net". In contrast, later, there is the sight of the shabby figure of the once powerful maharajah, unshaven, with trodden-down heels. An orotic nude, drawing by Procktor, possibly more symbolic than representational, faces the page describing this maharajah's dilapidated greenhouse, in which Rupert and Kirsti make love among the broken glass and tumbled pots of cacti.

Some of us may have an urge to seek out places of a lost past: places of happy childhood memories perhaps; or connected with people we have loved. Nearly always it turns out to be a mistake. There is a tragedy in this book, but at its heart is the moving and strongly felt theme of return and disillusion.

NB

Germany: whose history?

Peter Pulzer

"Like the human eye which shrinks from too much light, human consciousness cannot bear to contemplate the enormity of evil perpetrated by its fellow men. It is as if the observer were frightened by the potentiality of evil hidden in himself." These words appeared recently in the Polish Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*; the context was the dispute over the proposal to establish a Carmelite convent at the approaches to Auschwitz. So it is not only in Germany that we find an inability to cope with the implications of the Holocaust - with the suspicion that each of us might, under certain pressures, act inhumanely or obey inhumane orders; the fear that mass unreason might again seize a whole population; the secret relief at not having been put to the test; the incapacity to decide what terms like guilt and responsibility mean in the face of such meticulously planned massacres. Yet it is in Germany that such questions are bound to dominate public debate about the past. Indeed it is only in Germany among Western States that the interpretation of the past is a matter of passionate controversy. *Le Monde* or the *New York Review of Books* might carry learned debates about particular episodes; it is in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Zeit* that one must turn for a long-running series about the meaning of the national past. Which other country could have produced a film like Edgar Reitz's *Helden*?

This may be connected, as the Freiburg historian Heinrich August Winkler has suggested, with German "envy of the real or presumed normality of others". It undoubtedly has to do with the passage of time: forty years is a long time to carry the burden of the past. To many Germans the conciliatory message of President Reagan at the Bitburg military cemetery was more welcome than their own President's reminder of the catalogue of Nazi crimes. It may even have to do, as the Bochum historian Hans Mommsen suggests, with a

counter-attack by the historical profession against the intellectual primacy that the social sciences captured in the 1960s. It certainly has to do with an ancient tradition of public quarrelsomeness among German historians. Twenty-five years ago there was the great Fischer controversy, about the degree of German responsibility for the outbreak of the First World War. A hundred years ago the classical historian Theodor Mommsen refused even to speak again in this Berlin colleague Heinrich von Treitschke, who had given his moral support to the emergent antisemitic movement.

In the tradition of such disputes the present controversy over the place of the Third Reich in German history is carried on with a remarkable lack of gentlemanliness. The public show, as opposed to the scholarly debate, began in July 1986 with an attack by Jürgen Habermas on Andreas Hillgruber's *Zweiter Untergang*, a slim volume in which, *inter alia*, he paid a tribute to the German defenders of the Eastern front in 1945, and on various attempts by Ernst Nolte of Berlin to "historicize" the Holocaust. *Der Spiegel* followed this up by calling Hillgruber a "constitutional Nazi" and demanding a teaching ban on him. Michel Brumlik, who holds a chair at Heidelberg, went so far as to compare him with Heinrich Himmler. Hillgruber replied in kind; he saw the attack on his views as "a unique scholarly scandal" and part of a "politically motivated campaign of calumny". In Habermas's own views he detected "a malicious undertone", "foolish chatter" and a "dilettantish agitator".

The whole story is not without a certain obsessional Teutonic disputatiousness. But behind the smokescreen of vulgar abuse there are serious questions. Whom does history belong to? Is there a value-free science of the past? What part does history play in the public's political consciousness? Virtually everyone who is anybody in the German historical profession has contributed to the controversy now collected by Piper in *Historikertreit* (397pp, DM17.80, 3 492 10816 4), some with gusto, others more in sorrow than in anger, but all



"Millions stand behind me" by John Heartfield, from Photomontage: a political weapon by David Evans and Sylvia Gohlt (128pp, Gordon Fraser, £15.00 860920887).

convinced that there is more at stake here than an exchange of footnotes among professional antiquarians. But Habermas, whose last word on the subject was not included in that book, decided to publish it, along with his other contributions, in the latest volume of his political essays, *Eine Ari Schadensabwehrung: Kleine politische Schriften VI* (179pp, Suhrkamp, DM12.3 518 11453 0).

To one respect the subtitle of the Piper collection, *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, is misleading: the controversy is not only about the uniqueness of continued on page 1088

In brief

It is the fate of the artist, but perhaps none more than Ian Hamilton Finlay, to be misunderstood. In 1983, readers may remember (TLS April 29 of that year), the Scots poet and sculptor staged a (losing) battle - with tanks, traps and mine-fields - to save his Lanarkshire sculpture temple and garden, Little Sparta, from further pillaging by the rate-hungry local council. Recent attacks on individual enemies include a sculpture - at the Fondation Cartier in Paris - which is in fact a guillotine. At its foot lie the heads of four of Finlay's foes: the *Guardian* critic Waldemar Januszczak; *Art Press* editor Catherine Millet; Ian Baines, the chairman of Scotland's Saltire Society ("which is supposed to look after Scottish culture but does not"); and Gwynn Headly, author of the National Trust book of folkies, which included Little Sparta and, Finlay felt, once again trivialized his work. The original garden has been dismantled; its treasures remain in the custody of the Strathclyde Sheriff Officer. But with exhibitions in Germany, France and Spain, an eighteen-ton sculpture going up on a California campus, and a monument to be installed at Versailles in 1989, the artist appears to be a permanent fixture on the landscape.

Michael Holroyd will leave his post as president of English PEN in December (presumably to get on with his three-volume biography of Shaw, for which Chaito and Windus has paid a record advance of £625,000). In his two-year term Holroyd has led a vigorous fight to keep Turkey out of the Common Market because of its poor human rights record in respect of writers, many of whom are still imprisoned. But he considers his most significant contribution to have been the recruitment of almost one hundred new members (including Peter Ackroyd, Paul Theroux, Carol Rumens, Craig Raine, Emma Tennant). Their individual talents apart, the new members have rejuvenated what has tended to look a slightly geriatric organization. (Founded in 1921, the English centre is, in fact, the mother of all seventy-nine PENs.)

More members also means more letters on behalf of oppressed authors under whatever colour of régime. But PEN is not all protest. Members also enjoy what Holroyd calls PEN's "clubside" attractions (the autumn programme includes discussions on "Lorca as a countryman", "Food in Literature", and "On Being Vita's Son"). And this year's International Congress, to be held in Puerto Rico in December, offers delegates a chance to leave the Condado Beach Hotel and take "a tour of St Thomas which, for \$75, includes air transportation and five bottles of liquor (2 whiskey, 1 vodka, 1 gin, 1 rum)."

In a replay of the succession at the Society of Authors ten years ago, Antonia Fraser, who currently chairs English PEN's Writers in Prison Committee, will assume the presidency.

Letters

Commemorating the Anschluss

Sir, - With reference to Robert Knight's "Austrian notes" in your issue of September 18-24, and the reference line on its front cover, "History and Evasion in Waldheim's Austria", I would like to make a few comments.

1) There is no valid reason to call the Anschluss - whether in inverted commas, or not - a birthday. On the contrary, for practically all Austrians of today the Anschluss meant the death of Austria's independence, her disappearance from the map of Europe, and far thousands and thousands the beginning of suffering, and only too often violent death inflicted upon them by a ruthless régime.

2) When, in 1988, the Austrians come to recall the events of fifty years ago, they will approach this task not as a purely historical retrospect, nor as an attempt at justification, nor as an allocation of guilt, but as a sincere attempt to draw conclusions for the present and the future, in the sense of a democratic learning process.

3) Dr Knight, as a respected historian, must have found out during his research on the Anschluss that there were not only cheering crowds, but also a very great number of Austrians who resented the occupation of their country, and that about 70,000 of them were arrested within the first weeks after German troops had crossed the borders; not counting the 65,000 Austrian Jews murdered, 32,600 Austrians lost their lives in concentration camps and prisons for political reasons, and 2,700 were executed during the Nazi era.

4) Dr Knight should be aware that "the famous film footage of jubilant crowds greeting Hitler's homecoming into Vienna" was not produced by film teams of independent foreign countries or institutions, but by no fewer than eighteen film teams sent to Austria by the Reichspropagandaministerium in Berlin. Dr Goebbels therewith gave the world at large a first taste of his fiendishly effective propaganda machine, appearing at the same time the consciousness of those who should have supported Austria more in her fight against Nazism in the preceding years.

5) Without wishing to excuse or to belittle the existence of antisemitic feelings in Austria in the past or at present, it should nevertheless be remembered that many Jews chose Austria as a safe haven when Hitler came to power in Germany. After the war Austria once again readily offered her territory to refugees, including many tens of thousands of Soviet Jews, without regard to political and security risks and the financial burdens involved. One wonders whether such a policy could have been pursued for any length of time if antisemitism was of real political significance to the Austrian population, as Robert Knight implies.

REGINALD THOMAS, Austrian Ambassador to the Court of St James's, Austrian Embassy, 18 Belgrave Mews West, London SW1.

Argentina in the 1930s

Sir, - In answer to P. G. Suarez's letter (September 18-24): the period between 1930 and 1943 (more than a decade, I know) has been and still is called *la década infame* (Buenos Aires, 1945) to the books by John King and Christopher Towne Leland that I reviewed. This period started with a coup and ended with a coup, hence my use of "coups". Why this period was called infame has to do with the well-documented rise in anti-democratic tendencies, leading to the fraudulent 1937 elections, referred to by A. P. Whitaker as "scandalous" in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1971). If Mr Suarez has not heard of this expression - or what it points to - he could consult Chapter Four, "Infamy and Colonial Dreams", of Eduardo Crawley's *A House Divided: Argentina, 1880-1980* (1984).

JASON WILSON, Department of Spanish, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1.

Hopkins's Verse

Sir, - Tom Paulin has already been provided with answers to most of his questions (Letters, September 18-24) either in my edition of *Gerard Manley Hopkins* or in my letter to the TLS of September 4-11.

Hopkins's reputation has grown enormously since the first edition of his poems was prepared by Robert Bridges in 1918. The fourth edition, which awakened a new degree of interest in Hopkins's manuscripts, was not thought of as definitive by its editors. Professor MacKee has altered the text steadily over the years, always in the direction of showing more clearly what Hopkins wrote, where that could be done without precipitating any major resetting of the book. I have continued this process at a time when there is much more

been persecuted and this is the return match for the pogroms. The Jew... has his knife in the Empire of the Tsar, because his aunt was outraged and his father flogged in some one-horse location on the Volga.

Thus, for what it is worth, it can be seen that even the obsessed Scudder sees two sides to the question.

But just what are Scudder's views worth? His role is that of an expendable subsidiary character, bumped off at the end of the first chapter, whose role is clearly that of establishing an atmosphere of mystery and implanting false clues in the reader's mind. As readers will recall, the conspiracy with which Richard Hannay becomes embroiled has nothing to do with Jews, proving in fact to be a credible attempt by the German General Staff to obtain details of the mobilization plans of the British fleet in the event of war. As Sir Walter Bullivant observes to Hannay later in the story,

Scudder was half crank, half genius... The trouble about him was that he was too romantic. He had the artistic temperament, and wanted a story to be better than God meant it to be. He had a lot of odd biases, too. Jews, for example, made him see red. Jews and the high finance.

One could hardly look for a more overt authorial dismissal of Scudder's extravagant theory, and Sutherland appears uneasily aware of the weakness of utilizing the chance remarks of a minor character in a novel as evidence of the author's deeply held views. Since Scudder's views can hardly be expected to carry weight with anyone having the slightest acquaintance with the novel, Sutherland accordingly seeks to transpose them to Buchan's hero Hannay, claiming that he was eagerly receptive to Scudder's suggestion. However, in reality, Hannay is represented as entirely ignorant of all that lay behind Scudder's strange tale, and his sole reaction to the argument that the Jewish industrialist represents the secret power behind politics is a polite suggestion that Scudder's theory is becoming a trifle inconsistent: "I could not help saying that his Jew-anarchists seemed to have got left behind a little."

What else can one conclude but that Sutherland set out to distort the evidence in order to attribute to Buchan pernicious views he was well aware he had not expressed?

NIKOLAI TOLSTOY, Court Close, Southmoor, nr Abingdon, Berkshire.

Spy Fiction

Sir, - D. C. Watt effectively refutes (Letters, September 18-24) John Sutherland's wilder strictures against the genre of the espionage novel. In particular, he castigates the propagation of the "lie" that John Buchan was antisemitic, pointing out that the hero of *A Prince of the Capivary* is a Zionist.

Professor Sutherland may perhaps plead ignorance in this respect, in which case it seems appropriate to examine more closely the basis of his grave accusation against a much-admired novelist and public figure.

From Chapter One of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* Sutherland cites as evidence these remarks by the American agent, Franklin P. Scudder:

The Jew is everywhere, but you have to go far down the backstairs to find him... If you're on the biggest kind of job and are bound to get to the root of it, you are brought up against a little white-faced Jew in a bath-chair with an eye like a button.

Not very pleasant, certainly, when taken in isolation; but context is everything. What Sutherland has chosen to omit are the comments with which Scudder prefaces and closes these allusions:

Do you wonder? For three hundred years they have

detailed interest in Hopkins's manuscripts than in 1967 (when the fourth edition appeared) and when there will soon be a great deal more information. Bridges's version of "The Handsome Heart" is contained in my edition for those who wish to use it, but it is placed in the notes because it has no authority.

The issue of the "quiver" in "What hours, O what black hours we have spent" is one that I have already tackled (Letters, September 4-11). It would seem to be necessary, however, to reiterate the warnings in both the fourth edition and my own Oxford Authors text that readers working on Hopkins's rhythm need to refer to the notes.

As regards the "Red" letter, I quoted the central passages from it in my introduction (p xxii) where I could set them in a biographical context and comment on them. Finally, the capitalization of "nir-Built" in "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire..." comes from Hopkins's autograph and follows his consistent practice.

C. L. PHILLIPS, School of English, University of Exeter, Exeter.

'The Day of Judgement'

Sir, - I am sorry that my review of Salvatore Satta's *The Day of Judgement* read unclearly at one point to Brian Moloney (Letters, September 25 - October 1). All I was meaning to imply was that at certain moments Satta seems to want to distance himself from his narrator, giving him an outlook not tone of voice different from his (Satta's) own, but that at other moments the real Satta breaks through. That is to say, I was hinting of a slight failure in artistic consistency.

I agree warmly that it would be good to have translations of the rest of Satta.

P. N. FURBANK, 12 Leverton Street, London NW5.

New Editions

Sir, - "What is one to make of these two new and uniform editions?", asks Harold Beaver in his review of *The Future in America* and *The American Scene* (September 18-24), and then goes on to make a great deal of them, having first concluded that because they have no introduction, no notes, and an unsigned note on the text, "this seems a poor piece of publishing". It is surely a piece of academic arrogance to insist that the general reader (and our unsigned note makes it clear these books are for the general reader) needs the mediation of scholars to understand James and Wells.

It is expensive and time-consuming to prepare critical editions, and the academic presses can only take on so many. While waiting for the scholars to work through their priorities, reprint publishers reissue unedited books that would otherwise remain unavailable. In general, these small houses cannot afford to underwrite critical editions, nor can their readers afford to buy them. It may well be that Wells and James after "eighty years or so deserve better" than simple republication. The fault, however, lies with those capable of underwriting fuller "editions". But it is extraordinary to suggest that it is better for these books to remain out of print than to appear as we have issued them. And to demand, as Professor Beaver does, in the manner of medieval clergy, that the word should come through him and his brethren or not at all is simply a claim for a restrictive practice that we poor publishers and our poor readers can successfully ignore.

PAUL DUGUID, JOHN MURRAY-BROWNE, Granville Publishing, Angel Bookshop, 102 Idington High Street, London N1.

'Through Parisian Eyes'

Sir, - In R. W. Johnson's review of my book *Through Parisian Eyes* (July 31), he states that Malraux is "simply missing" from the book. Those who read or even skim the book are sure to come upon the section on Malraux containing an interview I did with him just before his death.

I shall not dwell on the implications of such an error, but merely ask that you set the record straight.

MELINDA CAMBER PORTER, 1 West 67th Street, New York, New York 10023.

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RUSCONI

COMMENTARY

That humming, drumming thing

Frances Spalding

Alfred Wallis, Christopher Wood, Ben Nicholson
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, until October 18

Despite a few detours into abstraction and across the sea to Brittany, the focus of this exhibition is St Ives, its huddled cottages, harbour, boats and fishermen, as portrayed by three artists, the sophisticated Ben Nicholson and Christopher Wood, and Alfred Wallis, a former scrap-merchant, ice-cream seller and odd-jobber who turned to painting at the age of seventy "for company". Nicholson and Wood's discovery of Wallis in 1928 is a celebrated event. Not only did it bring Wallis recognition but it also had an impact on the work of the two professionals: Wallis's formidable organization of the picture surface and the expressiveness of his vivid handling confirmed a search already begun for a "primitive" language, one that would free representational art from tired conventions.

Wallis's liberating impact is only partially registered here: without Nicholson's "Pill Creek", of which there are two versions, or an equivalent masterpiece by him from this period, none of which is available, the exhibition can only be top-sided. Apart from one picture, all Nicholson's work dates from the late 1930s onwards when, after a period of pure abstraction, he again began painting landscapes and still-lives, but now with a manicured elegance. Even when his style was at its most childlike, its naivety could not disguise an aesthetic sophistication. In this show, owing to incomplete representation, he appears the most decorative and only tenuously involved with his subject-matter.

In Wallis's art, on the other hand, naturalistic associations are to the fore. At Kettle's Yard his seas splash and heave, the sails of his boats catch the wind and steamers chug by. Not only did Wallis spend twenty-six years at sea before he became a scrap-merchant, but he

also experienced the Cornish fishing industry at its height. Frequently he insisted that what he painted in his seventies was what he knew rather than what he saw. "What I do moseley", he wrote, "is what used to be out of my own memory what we may never see again."

Wallis's approach, in its preference for the conceptual over the perceptual, paralleled the modernist's rejection of illusionism. But this is not the only reason why Christopher Wood, after his apprenticeship in Paris where he mixed with Picasso, Cocteau and others, found in this untrained painter and Bible-reading misanthrope a mentor. "More and more influence de Wallis," he told Winifred Nicholson, "not a bad master through." Wallis, who painted not at an easel but on a table top, sails around freely within the pictorial space. Wood, following Wallis's example, frequently changes the angle of vision in his paintings to enhance our involvement with the environment portrayed; in "La Plage, Hotel Ty-Mad", painted at Treboul in 1930, we look across the beach at the hotel, then down, as if from an aerial position, at the girl lying on the beach, the two conflicting viewpoints obliging the eye to circulate in and around the scene.

An odd touch here is the red unexpectedly running down the side of the girl's hair. In itself it does not explain the underlying desperation and blackness which in Wood's late paintings replace the childlike delight in the physical world that Wallis had done much to inspire. In order to recreate the texture of stone walls or the skipping lightness of sailors dancing, Wood broke with conventional techniques and learnt to use paint in a more direct way. In this he may again have been influenced by Wallis but more likely by Winifred Nicholson, whose absence makes another large hole in this show. Wood's paintings of St Ives jostle with energy and joie de vivre, are both lyrical and concise. Here is that "humming drumming thing" which kept him there, making daily visits to Wallis, long after the summer season had ended. With the beach huts put away, it seemed to him "like a garrison that is working in real earnest after a lazy peace".

Thoroughly modern movement

Kate Flint

Balla the Futurist
Riverside Studios, until October 4, Museum of Modern Art, Oxford from October 25 to December 6

Giacomo Balla called for a break with past traditions, and for an artistic expression of future times which were to be "colorful, iridescent, ideal, luminous, dynamic". Balla the Futurist emphasizes his significance as an experimenter and innovator, tracing the Futurist's work through his early years in Rome, the crucial pre-First World War period of dynamism and iconoclasm, and into his post-war excursions into aeroplasm - painting from a position of elevation made possible by modern technology - and furniture painting. The works exhibited are from the collection of the collector-dealer Paolo Spivieri, and the many sketches and preparatory drawings on show provide a useful complement to last year's ambitious Futurist exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi.

Balla's early paintings, such as "Ruman Night Scene with Street Lamp" (c 1902) and "Plough in the Campagna" (c 1904), demonstrate his concern with social issues, whether showing the alienating effects of the city landscape or the lack of picturesque in agricultural labour. Sharing his socialist ideals with such Divisionist artists as Pellizza da Volpedo, these pictures, with their streaks of grainy light and elongated darts of luminous colours, show how the turn-of-the-century interest in the representation of the effects of light led towards the far more radical Futurist experiments in showing the interpenetration of object and environment. This is shown in "Plasticity of Lights" (c 1913) and in a drawing closely related to Boccioni's static sculptures of kinetic forces, "Bottle x Space" (c 1914). Like the

other Futurists, Balla was fascinated by the problems of capturing three-dimensional movement on canvas. His playful side can be seen in the preparatory sketch "Legs in Movement" (1912) for his well-known "Girl Running on a Balcony" and the Movement's emphasis on mechanical speed and modern forms of energy appears in "Dynamic Penetrations of a Car" and "Motorcycle Speed" (c 1913). More than the other Futurists Balla became preoccupied by the representation of abstract forces - lines of speed, noise forms, vortices, and states and actions of mind, as in "The Idea Rises" (c 1920) and the conflicting black, blue and white swirls and angles of "Pessimism and Optimism" (c 1923). He also experimented with colours and their juxtaposition and interpenetration: it is a shame that the colour reproduction in Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco's catalogue *Balla the Futurist* (151pp, Milan: Mazzotta, £11.95, 88 202 0762 1) is not more exact.

Despite the useful amount of documentary evidence which he provides, Fagiolo's stress on Balla's intellectual investigations, and on the subjective responses induced by his work, provides a top-sided view of the artist. While the links with the organicist and mechanistic paintings of such artists as Depero and Prampolini in the post-war years are brought out, the text is curiously silent on the relationship of Balla, and indeed of Secondo Futurism as a whole, to the growth of Fascism. However technically radical their painting might be, Italian Futurist artists, with their celebration of modernity and progress which brought Marinetti so close to Mussolini, helped to form the basis of early Fascist artistic policy. The opportunity to see a range of Balla's work spanning his whole career is most welcome, but an almost complete absence of discussion about the way the work related to Italian society ensures that the study is limited to the internal history of a work, and that the art itself is allowed to rest safely in the realm of the decorative.



"The Lawn Tennis Season", by Mary Halliwell, 1881, from the exhibition *Painting Women*, reviewed here.

Maiden names

Angela Summerfield

Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists
Camden Arts Centre, until October 11

The organizer of this exhibition, Deborah Cherry, has chosen several specific themes through which to discuss how women's conception and portrayal of themselves were determined by Victorian society. Her approach draws upon a framework of Marxist-feminist theory and art history and relies on detailed exhibition panels and labels. The quality of the works selected inevitably varies, although the exhibition itself, which consists of oil paintings, watercolours, drawings and sketch-books, has been well displayed; many of the works have been rescued from basements and attics.

The first part of the exhibition deals with the institutional discrimination would-be artists faced, notably from the Royal Academy, which attempted to exclude women from its schools, and the development of alternative sources of instruction. As to who these women were, we are left in no doubt, for art was either the preserve of the wealthy or a livelihood for the daughters of artists. No attempt is made in the exhibition to distinguish the amateur from the professional, for although women artists exhibited widely at home and abroad (notably Alice Havers at the Paris Salon), women's art was generally regarded by contemporary commentators, as no more than an appropriate "accomplishment", as opposed to the accepted professionalism of male art.

How many women artists saw themselves as professional artists, is illustrated by two self-portraits, which show Mary Severn (Ann Mary Newton) clutching her portfolio while Milly Childers, boldly depicted in a red smock, holds her palette and brushes in an almost cavalier fashion. Women artists often taught their daughters and friends to paint and draw and associations such as the Society of Female Artists, which grew out of the "Langham Place" circle (here represented as "Jumphant, in a drawing entitled "Ye-Nowe Generation", by Barbara Leigh Bodichon, co-founder of the group) were formed. Even Queen Victoria, despite her conservative views on the role of women in society, bought and commissioned works from artists such as Mary Severn and Henrietta Ward.

Representations of the prescribed role of motherhood are examined under the heading "Picturing the Private Sphere", and include a delightful watercolour study of a baby by Lucretia E. Barker, Emma Brownlow's "The Sick Room" and several courtship scenes. Part of the charm of Victorian art is that it invites the viewer to construct a narrative, but Deborah Cherry uses the paintings "Wounded

Feelings" and "A Summer Show" to make a particular point about women's place in society today. An alternative and seldom depicted view of women's existence is shown in the section "Working Women", which includes a painting of the Cornish tin mine workers, "The B&L Maidens", by Emily Mary Osborn. The content of women's art is also examined. Flowers were seen as the natural subject-matter for women artists - even for those such as Elsie Harriet Stannard, whose male relatives were trained in marine and landscape painting. The exhibition also shows that, when permitted, women artists could be more than competent figure painters.

The final section deals with seascapes and landscapes, which were enjoyed by city dwellers either as escapist images, peopled by benevolent, picturesque or heroic figures, or as souvenirs of foreign travels. Shown here are notable works by Marianne Preindlberger (Mrs Adrian Stokes) and Elizabeth Armstrong (Mrs Stanhope Forbes), who together with her husband founded the Newlyn School of Art at St Ives. The exhibition is worth visiting just to see the latter's works, particularly the painting "A Game of 'Old Maid'", an evocative record of an interior lit by the waning sunshine of a late afternoon. Deborah Cherry's response to this work as an scene of young girls "inscribed into the laws of heterosexual desire" shows a lack of interest in picture-making characteristic of revisionist art history, which reduces paintings to the status of a historical fact, which in turn exists only as part of an ideological discourse. In the catalogue, too, which includes a useful bibliography, one finds that information is frequently submerged in a text which relies heavily on political and art-historical jargon, often with the result of obscuring the line of argument: "Art criticism, mostly written by men for journals, magazines and newspapers edited, administered and owned by men, worked within and constructed a phallogocentric language and system of meaning and significance which privileged masculinity." The use of maiden names also results in confusion.

Despite these flaws, *Painting Women* remains a worthy project, lovingly companioned with the exhibition, *The Substance of the Dow - Images of Victorian Womanhood*, held at New Haven in 1982. It is certain both to stimulate interest in and encourage further debate on Victorian women artists.

Art - the work to which Clive Bell set forth his theory "significant form" - has been released with a new introduction by J.B. Bullen (318pp, Oxford University Press, Paperback, £5.95, 0 19 282049 4). First published in 1914, and now regarded as a curiosity by most art historians, Art helped gain recognition in Britain for the Post-Impressionists.

Horrible coincidence

John Turner

NICK DARKE
Ting Tang Mine
Cottesloe Theatre

Ting Tang Mine is an actors' play, well suited to the Cottesloe's rather precious informality and crisply written to engage an audience. Nick Darke, whose previous black comedies have made light of the loathsome, has an ear for comic dialogue to which his players can respond. His new play goes slightly astray by uncovering social themes which cannot be cut down to size, after his usual fashion, with verbal batchers' knives, but need tools with more philosophic heft.

The story is of a Cornish copper-mining village which falls victim to a horrible coincidence in 1815. The market for ore begins to wobble, and a ludicrous prodigy, Jan May (Robert Glenister), returns with a fancy coat and a bag full of money. His family, too tired to notice the opportunities and too firmly rooted in one spot to care very much about his cosmopolitan yams, offend him by refusing his money and he wanders off to the next hamlet, Brian. There he falls into the clutches of Salathiel Trennigan (Barbara Jefford), an androgynous and drunken harpist who sells him a dud copper mine and takes the rest of his money to help found a fraudulent bank in company with Hailsham (Leslie Sands), a disgruntled ex-partner in the Ting Tang mine. Their machinations, with Jan May a feckless stooge, kill the price of copper and bankrupt Ting Tang. Off stage in London Hailsham tries, by bribery, to prevent the passage of the "Labour Protection Bill" which will put an end to their exploitation of mines.

The plot comes together, and then rather collapses into a heap, when Hailsham returns unsuccessful, and Mrs Roscove (Hazel Ellery), the owner of Ting Tang, for whom Jan

May has an utterly unrequited passion, comes to borrow money from the Bank to keep open the mine and keep the Ting Tang miners, his own family included, away from starvation. Jan May unfolds the true story of his riches - he has not strayed beyond Plymouth, and he stole the money and his absurd clothes from a shipwreck - and proposes marriage to Mrs Roscove, who accepts conditionally. It emerges that her brutal first husband was the drowning man whom Jan May brainied with a rock to secure possession of his treasures.

All this is great fun and well staged. The performances are effective and convincing, the dialogue is sharp and memorable. The setting is what one has learned to expect with affection: the ICA has recently been described as a playroom for adults, but the Cottesloe stage so often resembles the adventure playground in Battersea Park that no play would seem complete without a climbing frame and plunking. All this, and singing too.

Nick Darke sees and reveals the grotesque in human relationships, whether of love, lust, maternal affection or filial respect. His vision of the social framework in which his characters are buried is very much less distinct. If the play is, as the programme note suggests, influenced by a critique of the market economy and its impact on human life, it blurs its message by seeming to contrast the freedom of sub-contract labour with the subservience of the wage relationship. The basic message, that the bosses are both cruel and crooked and the workers are divided by false consciousness, is hardly new and there seems no great merit, besides the loyalty of a native son, in setting it in early nineteenth-century Cornwall. The risk, not entirely avoided, is of making the past seem archaic and faintly ridiculous, instead of squalid, dangerous and cruel. Christian sectarianism, for example, is ridiculed in the manner of twentieth-century liberalism; the back-chat has the pace and cynicism of the 1960s. But this is theatre, and neither anachronism nor ambiguity matters on the night.

Posthumous plotting

Winton Dean

GEORGES BIZET
The Pearl Fishers
Coliseum

Like all Bizet's major operas *The Pearl Fishers* suffered a process of textual corruption. In performance and in print, after his early death. Between 1886 and the Welsh National Opera revival in 1973 it was performed in several versions, all of which (in addition to other changes) reshaped both the plot and the music of the last scene. The English National Opera have sensibly followed the Welsh example in restoring the only version Bizet knew, that of the original 1863 production. It remains an uneven opera, rich in melody and beautifully scored, with many flashes of the later Bizet - notably the two off-stage numbers in Act Two with their flavour of *L'Arlesienne* - but also some feebly derivative choruses, one of which earned the censure of Berlioz. The influence of Gounod is not to be despised: Bizet transmitted the rich lyricism of his best music as well as the inflated religiosity of his worst.

The Pearl Fishers was not Bizet's first full-length opera, though it was the earliest to reach the stage. There is little doubt that the first (and only surviving) score of *Yvni IV* preceded it. He received the commission in April 1863, with production set for mid-September. The patchy quality, of which Bizet was soon aware (he all but disowned the opera a few years after its completion), was accentuated by the circumstances under which it was composed. The sickly libretto was not of his own choice and he had to work against time. This is reflected in the comparative weakness of Act Three (apart from the admirable chorus and dance at the start of the second scene) and the fact that he lifted several ideas from *Yvni*, including the feeble line of the lovers' duet at the pyre. It is easy to see why posthumous revivals have

balked at this, but the substitution of a flatulent trio by Godard only makes things worse. At least the ENO give us what Bizet wrote.

Sir Charles Mackerras conducts with refreshing commitment. He is at his best in Romantic opera and has the rare knack of blinding even threadbare passages into a convincing whole. The one misjudgment is the snail's pace at which he takes the Prelude and its return at Leila's entry; it is after all marked andante and represents a priestly dedication ceremony, not a funeral. The standard of singing is very high. The Russian baritone Sergei Leiferkus is a splendidly firm and resolute Zurga, in voice and demeanour, even if his gallant struggles with the English language (the opera was given in the Moody translation) render his utterance more than a little opaque. Valerie Masterson, always happy in French music, floats a lovely pianissimo line in Leila's Act Two cavatina with its striking anticipation of Micaela in Act Three of *Carmen*. Adrian Martin sings Nadir's Romance for what it is, a dreamy reminiscence, not an excuse for releasing an ear-splitting C. Chorus and orchestra are both excellent.

The production is more questionable. Philip Prowse, who designed and produced, puts forward some good ideas in both departments but also some perversities. The peripatetic pagoda-like towers, attractive in themselves, would have served their purpose better by keeping still. The period is more or less that of the opera, which is apt enough; but the interpolation of what appear to be decadent representations of the British Raj serves no obvious purpose and becomes tiresomely distracting when a stout European intercedes drunkenly with the dancing (of which there is scarcely enough) during the finest number in Act Three. Another intrusion is a Carmen-like figure who prowls about in a sultry manner throughout the opera and sings Zurga in the back at the final curtain, thereby restoring one of the posthumous corruptions of the plot.

It is a pity that the ENO's production should

Slave-trade syllabus

David Nokes

Bookmark: *Crusoe's Children*
BBC2

"It is the one book that teaches all that books can teach", was Rousseau's verdict on *Robinson Crusoe*, and the lessons learnt by *Crusoe's Children* ranged widely through the syllabus. There was, however, little enthusiasm in Roland Keating's quirky *Bookmark* programme for the novel's Victorian schoolroom status as the gospel of self-help. Little sympathy too for the notion of spiritual penance. The idea that being put on a tropical island was God's punishment for sin brought a wry grin to the face of the advertising executive Tony Hodges. In the ad-man's lexicon of images, he explained, desert islands always symbolized a bounty-hunter's paradise. The programme opened with a neat ironic touch. Quoting *Crusoe's* description of his middle-class home as enjoying "the best state in the world", it presented a seventeen-year-old would-be castaway in equally comfortable surroundings, planning a spot of post-A level knifing. "I've got a contact out in Fiji who's looking for an island for me", he explained, indicating that even self-helpers need their support systems.

For Jane Gardam, author of the novel *Crusoe's Daughter*, Defoe's chief lesson was in marketing an idea. "He knew he had hit on a winner", she said. Pat Rogers was more sceptical of Defoe's marketing skills. How ironic, he remarked, that this author of the bible of self-help was himself a life-long bankrupt. The DIY expert Harry Greene had a warning for latter-day *Crusoes* about treating the novel as a practical manual. Like a woodwork master with a fourth-form class he pointed out the impossibilities of *Crusoe's* feats with unseasoned timber. Yet the chief fascination of Defoe's story seemed to be its infinite adaptability: like a basic imaginative kit capable of endless do-it-yourself variations. Hollywood's *Crusoe* was an early Tarzan, exemplified by shots of Douglas Fairbanks swinging through the trees. For the Nazis he was a Siegfried figure, felling mighty trees to a Wagnerian accompaniment. To Jane Gardam, *Crusoe* seemed like a woman, alone and trapped, a common female experience. Michel Tournier,

author of *Friday, or The Other Island*, found a mathematical lesson in the book. Defoe had successfully reduced the problems of existence to a simple binary system: first there is one man, then there are two. But for Caryl Phillips the book was an adventure playground, reminding him of Enid Blyton's children's books, in which the Famous Five rough it for a whole weekend with nothing but jam sandwiches and fizzy pop to sustain them. Lucy Irvine, author of *Castaway*, took a bounty-hunter's view. Pined potentionally in the middle of a stream she complained of *Crusoe's* sexlessness. "Why didn't he have the lust of the flesh?" she asked. Her own book would have been "loughed off the bookshelves" without its descriptions of her "deep inner feelings".

Through all the visual patter of children's adaptations and pantomime travesties, a serious and shomful lesson began to emerge for twentieth-century readers: *Robinson Crusoe* is the classic myth of colonialism. David Dwyer put the case most forcibly, identifying not with the slave-owner *Crusoe*, but with Friday, the slave. For Caryl Phillips, himself a black writer, the problem was more complicated. He had always identified with *Crusoe*, though the children in the playground called him Friday. But the desire in *Friday's* child rather than *Crusoe's* was most evident in the white authors. Adrian Mitchell and Michel Tournier, Mitchell's *Man Friday* ironically reverses the educational roles, celebrating Friday's attempts to teach an inhibited European to dance rather than *Crusoe's* syllabus of self-discipline. The programme ended with a dramatized extract from J. M. Coetzee's recent novel *Foe* in which the negro bodies from *Crusoe's* shipwrecked slave-ship form a hallucinatory vision of Judgment.

As a popular classic *Robinson Crusoe* was a perfect subject for television treatment. With an almost inexhaustible supply of book illustrations and film versions to choose from, the programme also indulged us with localities ranging from a Caribbean beach to an employment agency's "Person Friday" files. This season *Bookmark* has abandoned its magazine-style format in favour of a single-subject approach, but this opening programme, with its range of references from the slave-trade to the Club Méditerranée offered enough to fill any colour supplement.

Cross examinations

Jonathan Sumption

JEFFREY ARCHER
Beyond Reasonable Doubt
Queens Theatre

"The curtain and lights", according to the programme, "will be lowered at certain times to denote the passage of time." Jeffrey Archer's first play is on old-fashioned Edwardian melodrama, the kind of thing that J. B. Priestley used to write long after Edward's time. The formula still has plenty of life left in it.

Sir David Metcalfe QC, a former Chairman of the Bar and a famous defence lawyer, kills his incurably ill wife, with her connivance, by administering a lethal overdose of pain-killers with a cup of tea. His original intention is to admit that this was a mercy-killing. But he then decides in denial that he knowingly administered the pills and to conduct his own defence at the Old Bailey. He does this, it seems, in order to spite the leading prosecuting counsel, a wooden bore, who has always been his rival - in love, at Oxford and at the Bar. After his acquittal, Sir David confesses all to the faithful family solicitor and commits suicide by swallowing some of the remaining pills.

Like its classic Edwardian archetypes, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt* is a neatly constructed play. The unexpected twists occur at the appointed times: the moments of suspense begin and end exactly when one knows they will. The trial fills the whole of the first act and ends with the return of the jury, but before the actual delivery of their verdict. We are there-

fore left on tenterhooks before we can discover whether he done it, or whether it was the housekeeper, or the solicitor or junior counsel. In Act Two we go back to the fatal night and see events as they actually happened. The confession and suicide follow in a short epilogue.

It has to be said that the trial scenes are quite ghastly: packed with clichés, bogus tension, hackneyed and improbably brief cross-examinations. "Is it true, Sir David, that you are famous for your successful defence of weak cases?" Perhaps they really do say that at the Old Bailey. There are grateful acknowledgements in the programme for the advice of a well known criminal QC and for the loan by a Lincoln's Inn bookseller of a copy of *Archbold*, the criminal lawyer's bible.

An author, however, deserves to be judged by his best moments and things look up in the second act. Sir David scintillates at his dinner parties, delivers rapid and effective repartees across his ruffled drawing-room and declaims in length from *Under Milk Wood* (you know, the way one does). There is some clever dialogue here, good light entertainment like the author's books, nothing very profound but certainly not to be sneered at. There are creditable performances of the rather standard-issue roles: Frank Finlay (articulate, lovable, ex-trover harrister), Wendy Craig (noble dying wife), Antonia Pemberton (prejudiced old boot of a housekeeper).

The dramatization by Michelene Wandor and Mike Alfreds of Eugene Sue's novel *The Wandering Jew* will be published by Methuen on October 8. The play was staged at the Lyttelton Theatre, directed by Mike Alfreds, and reviewed in the TLS of August 21.

Without fear or shame

Michael Hofmann

ROBERT FERGUSON
Enigma: The life of Knut Hamsun
453pp. Hutchinson. £19.95.
019 1671112

Enigma is a remarkable personal achievement for Robert Ferguson. It is, to begin with, a first book. Second, while Knut Hamsun is being read once more, it would appear from the bibliography that he has not been much written about in the past twenty or thirty years. Third, as Ferguson points out, Hamsun has generally eluded the English imagination: in 1920, the year he won the Nobel Prize, he was sent a questionnaire by *The Times*, eager to have a profile on him in their series of international celebrities; among the headings was "Clubs. Not Exceeding Three in Number. Please." The first English edition of *Pan* contained an illustration showing the hero (in Ferguson's painted description) "striding along outside a cricket pavilion intended to represent his hut in the forest, and wearing a pair of cricket trousers." (The English failure to appreciate Hamsun was returned with interest, as we shall see.) Last but not least is the fact that Ferguson's interest in Hamsun began sixteen years ago, when he read that same *Pan*, quickly read it three more times in succession, then everything of Hamsun's he could find in translation. He then enrolled as a student of Norwegian, and now lives in Oslo. One almost expects to hear that he is the youngest of seven brothers. Enigma is a product of such exceptional, overriding commitment, it seems disrespectful, almost irrelevant to say so; but I would still like to express the hope that the author may go on to write other studies, possibly a tribute to his interpretive gifts – on older subjects, where there might be the most scope for his twofold, hypothesizing intelligence.

One might identify three principal obstacles in the way of an understanding of Knut Hamsun: the first is his quality as a man, which amply justifies the title of his biography (though otherwise I don't care for it). The second is the incredible mark on him of his support for the Nazis, given before the Second World War, during it, when they occupied Norway, and even after it, when Hamsun's remarks in the course of mental and psychiatric tests, and during his trial for treason in 1947 sound dismayingly unrepentant. The third is his great age – ninety-three – when he died; this fact surely relates to and complicates both his personality and his politics. One might adapt Scott Fitzgerald and say the longevity is different – and not just in having longer lives. Many of the classic literary lives are short, hectic, enmeshed affairs, with the early deaths of a Kleist or a Shelley working back into them in premonitory shadows. They have a clarity and quality of absoluteness that one cannot find in Hamsun. The effect of living through so much public and private history, of physically enduring so much change, is paradoxically to put in doubt one's faith in the continuity of such a life. In one sense, time makes a fool of Hamsun: the man who detested bicycles, dentures, italics, ready-made shoes, living into the middle of the twentieth century! But in another way, the time lives in him and he draws strength from it: he was almost fifty years old when Norway received full independent nationhood from Sweden; *Hunger* immortalized Christianity in 1890, thirty-five years before its name was changed to Oslo; at his trial, he said he was old enough to have a code of conduct for himself. Hamsun's life draws an almost mythical, and certainly an intimidating authority from its scale, especially *vis-à-vis* a young country like Norway. If one hears this in mind, it is a little easier to understand his peculiar bringing of lawsuits against other people (a nephew, in one case) who tried to use his name. It is as though that name, derived from his childhood home of Hamsund in the north of Norway, and achieving its final form by the grace of a printer's error, were the one thing that held his being

together over so much time. Certainly, the scale of Hamsun's life makes for some rather striking timings and proportions, not all of them leisurely or inflated. He was born in 1859 (which he sometimes rounded up, more for simplicity than vanity), as Knud Pedersen, the fourth of seven children of a



tailor and smallholder. He enjoyed ostensibly six years of education in a travelling school in the remote north, and by the age of twenty had worked in several trades and published three books in a kind of regional pre-career. By thirty, he had twice been to America as a labourer and shopkeeper – these were the peak years of Norwegian emigration – returning the first time in the confident expectation of dying of

galloping tuberculosis within a few weeks. The famous story of his sitting on the roof of the train and breathing 2,000 miles' worth of American air is true, the TB, alas, was a wrong diagnosis. When he came home the second time, he began work on *Hunger*; it was, among other things, a pretty accurate reflection of his own circumstances. The book was published in 1890, and the chapter on it, probably still his best-known work, comes just a quarter of the way into his biography. *Mysteries* followed in 1892, and *Pan* in 1894. He first married when he was almost forty, and re-married ten years later; his youngest child, Ellnor, was born when he was fifty-seven. His best-looking photographs were taken in his fifties. His reputation was at its height in the 1910s and 20s, when he was writing popular epics: the *Sejler* and *August* trilogies, opinionated and awash with characters. "In America, Scandinavia and Germany he was widely regarded as the greatest living writer, and was probably the most admired and imitated literary figure of his day." For his seventieth birthday, in 1929, those paying tribute to him just in Germany and Austria included "Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse, Robert Musil, Arthur Schnitzler, Jacob Wassermann, Stefan Zweig, Martin Buber, Arnold Schoenberg, Albert Einstein." His seventy-fifth, however, was hailed in a periodical called *Der Nordische Aufseher*, the organ of the Nordic Society; the names of the grantees have been largely forgotten, but "Obbebold, who once nurtured literary ambitions himself, also sent his greetings." Altogether, Hamsun's career as a writer lasted for some seventy years, and one can fairly say that there was no degree of success or obloquy that he did not at some stage experience in it: his local *semidar* efforts as a very young man; the trials and failures before *Hunger*; and the provocations and needlings subsequent to it; the Nobel Prize for *The Growth of the Soil* in 1920, and sales that went into six figures in Germany in the 1930s when he was the most (liberally) reputable international author; in the Nazi camp; and the period during and after the war in Norway, when his conduct and his remarks, couched in their returning to books in him in August.

When this chaotic, rigid and unwieldy personality "changed sides" in 1910, and became a spokesman to and for Norway; and even more later on, when this public role was combined with privacy, increasing deafness and withdrawal from literature in the late 1930s, the results would be catastrophic. Ferguson shows how old and ingrained all of Hamsun's positions are: his loyalty to Germany stemming from his quick acceptance there in the 1890s; his Anglophobia plausibly and shockingly traced to a couple of historical incidents he read about as a child; his thick authoritarian streak; his advocacy of youth; his distrust of liberalism, culture and democratic politics. A position once taken, he never seemed to deviate from it or even allow it to be mitigated. A characteristic pattern is the almost contradictory one of naming or acknowledging an error and then re-affirming it: on anachronisms in his novels. "By the way, there is no question of mistakes." I knew quite well what I was doing, on his position with the Nazis. "I was

not been enrolled, but I have belonged to Quisling's Party." Ferguson's description of Hamsun's last book, *On Overgrown Paths*, his own version of events from 1945 to 1948, might almost be applied to *The Pisan Cantos*: "the matchless ability to celebrate the scintillating brilliance of the trivial in life, joy in small things, details, the affirmation of the value of the useless." However, unlike Pound, Hamsun was not able to grace his book with any admission of his error. Ferguson's starting-point is Thomas Mann's refusal of 1955:

I will not have anything to do with the formation of a Knut Hamsun Society. I know quite well that the stigma of his politics will one day be separated from his writing, which I regard very highly; and as a close student of both this work and his person I recognize the inevitability, however regrettable, of his conduct during the Nazi era. But the wretched, and really wicked things he constantly said, wrote and did are still too fresh in my mind for me to find the time right for the formation of such a society.

It would be pleasant to believe in this relativism, as Mann, I think, pretends to do: that Hamsun's wickedness may stale, that his writing may some time float clear of his politics and his person. But Hamsun's standing, in Germany in particular, must be forever in question. In 1936, shortly after many of his admirers had been driven into exile, expropriated, and their books burned, Hamsun's sales in Germany topped half a million. When the German satirist and lyricist Kurt Tucholsky killed himself in Sweden, in 1935, he was working on a letter to a newspaper, rebuking Hamsun for the stupidity of his politics. He had Hamsun's photograph on his wall, and just a couple of years earlier he had written that he could not have anyone for a friend who was not an admirer of the Norwegian. The case of Hamsun must be one of the strongest and most dramatic in literary history, showing that the pursuit of literature does nothing to protect a writer from the crassest of errors, that, as a civilizing force, it is inadequate. And thus, his "punishment" – mistrust and reservation and disappointment – must be exemplary too. There remains something deeply disagreeable about apologists for Hamsun, for instance the German monograph on him of 1958, where the author speaks of the licence of genius, says that the creation of great works demands a great price, and pushes most of the Nazism on to Hamsun's wife Marie. But the point about Hamsun is that he is unrepentant (constitutionally), that he demands to be taken all together, that he sees his life and ideas as unswervingly true. So it is to Robert Ferguson's great credit that he is not in too much of a hurry, that he allows his Enigma to remain unsolved at the end.

Fortunately, one may read without becoming a fully paid-up member of any Knut Hamsun Society, particularly the early books, and most of all *Hunger* and *Mysteries* – not among the favourites of Germans fifty years ago, and found to be "uncharacteristic" by the monographer. Nothing else quite matches up to them: not the love stories *Pan* (Ferguson's favourite) and *Victoria*; not the many ideological social novels Hamsun wrote in this century. On the strength of his first two books, one might have predicted a completely different, revolutionary career for the author; but, instead, he evolved into a naturalistic, skilful and popular storyteller, the very opposite of what he had been to *Hunger*: "I haven't tried to write a novel; but a book without wedding, trips to the countryside, dances at the local traders" – all of them features of his later books! Hamsun describes *Hunger* as being about "the secrets of the nerves in a starving body". Its subject is thus not merely thin, but inviable – in a wonderfully and dismayingly physical world. Page for page, it must raise more dread and apprehension in the reader than any book ever written. Hamsun was surely right in claiming that not even Dostoevsky contained "a greater number of spiritual fluctuations". Everything that touches the nameless hero seems to do so with needles: a carafe, a meal, a loan, a street encounter. In a world as flowing as a Munch painting – without shell, skin, limit – distance is the only form of security. Corresponding to distance is time: *Hunger* is full of clocks and bells and timings. The first event in it is a clock struck six somewhere below. "The

hero is very particular about recording the time; its regularity, predictability and universal validity are all at variance with the demented clockwork of his own consciousness, a brave and grotesque face put over it. For in fact it is the agony of his own predicament that measures time.

In *Mysteries*, the machine is the small coastal town – the first of many in Hamsun's work – the tight farcical world of meetings too statistically probable to be called chance, the permutations of a yellow suit, a red parasol and a green skirt. "To the right was the parsonage, to the left the town, and above an endless sea of blue sky." Or then again, perhaps not. Because *Mysteries* is as tricky as a barrelful of mirrors. It moves towards the third person, has a named hero, Nagel (the dedicatee of *Pan*), but lives from the collusiveness between narrator and hero, deliberately withholding information from the reader, and playing with his expectations. The description of Nagel is a quietly hilarious piece of equivocation, with every phrase a balance of blandness, information and hollow reassurance: "below average in height . . . deep brown eyes which had a strange expression, and a soft, rather feminine mouth . . . a plain ring of lead or iron. His shoulders were very broad; he was between twenty-eight and thirty, but definitely not older, although his hair was beginning to turn grey at the temples." It is as though the author has been given aspects of half a dozen characters, been told to make them into one, and made rather a poor job of it.

The more orthodox the later Hamsun, the more charmed and winsomely charming these trickster-figures of his. By the time of *Wayfarers* (1927), Nagel has been transmuted into August, a rootless, gold-toothed, gold-ringed, gold-watched wanderer and jack-of-all-trades, whose function in a symbolically suggested North Norway is purely catalytic: getting marshes drained, barns built, fish-drying grounds prepared, and then moving on. As Ferguson says, the book is like "high quality soap opera", with soap opera boundaries of sex and bankruptcy. The earlier Hamsun had made a far smaller world appear far larger, richer and more eventful. There is something smug and superficial about the late books, too much is external, there is not enough doubt. The author smiles as August goes scattering gold rings and watches among his brief female acquaintance, he frowns at mechanization and emigration to America, his characters grow like houseplants into the spaces provided for them, and his aged narratorial voice retails its wisdom: "So it comes and goes. Indeed it does. Everything comes and goes, but some things go under. It cannot be otherwise." One can almost feel the left hand clamped across the shaking right, holding it down, driving the pencil into the paper. At his trial, Hamsun said: "I was left dangling between heaven and earth." That was – and is – his true element.

INFORMATION, PLEASE

Richard Baxter (1615-91): original letters to or from him (other than those held in major libraries), seventeenth-century references to his correspondence and later transcripts or printings of any of his letters in lesser known periodicals or publications; for a calendar of the correspondence to be published by Oxford University Press.

N. H. Keeble.
University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4LA, Scotland.

Sir Edward Tyas Cook (1857-1919): letters and family papers; for an article.

Scoby Whittingham.

Turner House, 153 Cromwell Road, London SW5 OTD.

Edgell Rirkword (1898-1982): correspondence, documentation, reminiscences, photographs or other material; for the authorized biography to be published by Carcanet Press. Charles Hobday.

28 Tynelow House, Holland St, London W8 7NX.

Florence Kate Upton (1873-1922): portraits (usually signed "F. K. Upton") of soldiers in the First World War; for a biography.

Norma S. Davis.

3010 Jesse Knight Humanities Building, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602, USA.

The returning agony

Hugh Denman

PRIMO LEVI
I sommersi e i salvati
167pp. Turin: Einaudi. L11,000.
48 16 59415 5
Vzdo di forma
264pp. Turin: Einaudi. L16,000.
88 06 594055
SUSAN ZUCCOTTI
The Italians and the Holocaust: Persecution, rescue and survival
334pp. Hobart: distributed by Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £14.95.
1 870015037

In *I sommersi e i salvati* (The Drowned and the Saved), written not long before his death last April, Primo Levi returned to the scarring subject-matter of his first book *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Is a Man). The present title with its Danteque ring was in fact a chapter heading in the earlier work and the reference is to a question that has continually haunted Levi, namely, what were the factors that enabled a handful to survive among the millions who perished in the Holocaust?

Se questo è un uomo is still the book for which Levi is best known. Written in the months following his repatriation to Turin soon after the end of the war, it is a sober narration of his experiences during the eleven months he spent in Buna-Monowitz, one of the numerous dependent camps attached to Auschwitz. The book passed largely unnoticed when it was first published in 1947, but after its reissue by Einaudi in 1958 and translation into English in 1960 (TLS, April 15 of that year), it was recognized as having qualities that distinguished it from most other accounts of life and death in the Nazi concentration camps. In contrast to many moving personal testimonies to the horrifying mental and physical torments their authors had suffered, Levi's work was remarkable for its clarity and focus, and also

because it achieved a degree of detachment that enabled him to assess some of the significance of what had occurred. After a further autobiographical work, *La Tregua* (TLS, June 14, 1963) – published in English as *The Truce*, 1965 – in which he recounted the journey which took him from the gates of Auschwitz via the forests of White Russia back to Italy, Levi turned to creative fiction and poetry.

The overtly entertaining tone of much of Levi's fiction of the late 1960s and 70s seemed to some extent to indicate that his original testimony had exorcised the Furies that pursued him. But frequent allusions and images make it clear that the depressive incubi and feelings of irrational guilt that have afflicted most survivors were never for below the surface. His need to rehearse the torments he had witnessed is clear from his allusion to the words of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner: "Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns: / And till my ghastly tale is told / This heart within me burns" – words which not only provide him with the title of his collection of poetry, *Ad ora incerta* (At an Uncertain Hour), 1984, but also with the motto (in Italian) stands at the beginning of *I sommersi e i salvati*. Another nightmare, which Levi shares with many who have passed through the same hell, is the fear that he will simply not be believed and that his witness will have been in vain. (It was in part this apprehension that led him to seek opportunities to talk to young people in schools about his experiences.) None the less, despite the intensity of his feelings, the tone of *I sommersi e i salvati* is even more reflective and analytical than that of *Se questo è un uomo*.

What most helped Levi to survive his ordeal at Monowitz was the fact that, shortly before deportation, he had graduated *summa cum laude* in chemistry at the University of Turin in order to read his textbooks, he had had to study German. He owed his double talent of suup to I. G. Farben's need for his knowledge of organic chemistry in its attempts to produce synthetic rubber; and his ability to understand

Feltrinelli

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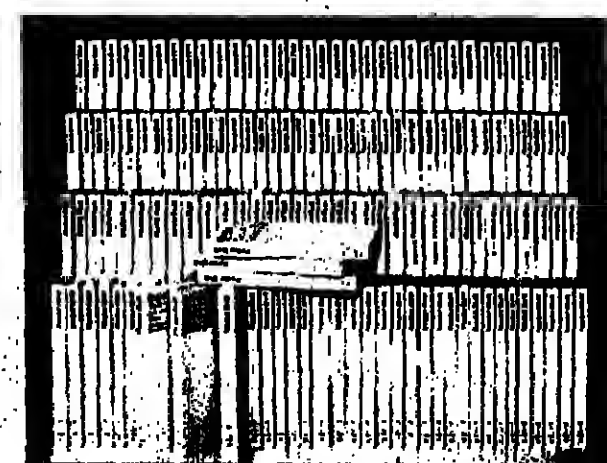
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CHRISTIAN BOURGEOIS EDEUR

the darkest orders of the *Kaput* and SS thugs made it possible for him to survive in a climate where most of his non-German-speaking compatriots were doomed. Most significantly, though, Levi's scientific training sharpened his native talent for precise, dispassionate observation of psychological detail; and this skill, not only was potentially life-saving, but also makes him an ideal witness. His detachment at times goes so far as to enable him to see the camps as a gigantic biological experiment, whose extreme conditions make it easier to determine which of our characteristics are fundamental to our natures and which acquired by socialization. What motivates him most strongly is his need to understand what it was that made both the oppressors and the victims act in the way they did. He is above all concerned to expose the stereotypes of literary and especially cinematographic myth that falsify the truth, whether by sentimentalizing the victims or dehumanizing them. It is ridiculous, in his view, to suppose that Nazism should have sanctified its victims. While stressing that the primary guilt must always rest with the tormentors and the creators of the system, he attempts to look at objectively as he can at the "grey area" of the victims who were spiritually or morally degraded by the vast machinery of annihilation. He also tries to trace the complex, autotherapeutic processes by which the memories of both victims and perpetrators are edited and distorted in the course of time and in this respect his concern reminds one of the image of grass growing on the graves in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*.

Levi is at his best when he focuses his keen naturalist's eye on individual phenomena. His enquiries take place on an ethical and psychological plane, almost without recourse to social and economic history. When he looks for global explanations for human cruelty and misery he turns towards a cosmological pessimism in which the ghetto or the concentration camp is seen as the quintessence of the human situation. Speaking for instance of the pathetic and criminal megalomania of Khayim Rumkowski, who with German help made himself the "king" of the Łódź ghetto before sharing the common fate at Auschwitz, Levi invites the reader to consider the vain nympho ambitions of those of us who forget "that we are all in the walled ghetto, that outside stand the lords of death and that close at hand the train is waiting". The insight into the springs of human behaviour which he gained at so appalling a price gives him a singular perspective from which to comment on a wide variety of social behaviour patterns, ranging from the aggressive motivations of football crowds to the violent excesses of Italian terrorists in the 1970s. One is somewhat startled to find that Levi is able to leave so grim a topic with an urbanely ironic wit – particularly evident when Levi is observing some of the less immediately homicidal Nazi lunacies. But sadly, for all the refined control of his writing, it would seem that Levi died in despair, still haunted by the nightmare that only the *Lager* is real.

Whereas Levi's autobiographical writings have met with almost universal respect, the reception given to his short stories has been somewhat condescending. It is easy to think of them as little more than elegantly constructed fantasies or whimsical *divertissements*. *Viola di forma* (Formal Defect) is a collection of moral fables set for the most part in the near future. They are cast in much the same vein as his *Storie naturali*, which were first published in 1966 under a pseudonym, as Levi was aware that his readers would be expecting something very different from the author of *Se questo è un uomo* and *La Tragedia*. None the less he himself felt that there existed an underlying continuity between his reflections on Auschwitz and his stories (some of which had been written concurrently). Reading attentively one becomes aware of the same images, the same reflective sensibility and meticulously crafted prose. For Levi, nature and matter are malignant forces with which *Homo faber* must wrestle. Whether he is a chemist, engineer or writer, he must struggle to give shape to his recalcitrant material, but his reason is perilously fragile, and subject to contamination by the same all-pervading perversity. The stories collected in both *Viola di forma* and *Storie naturali* hinge on some "formal defect" in the material environment, in

human nature or in some all too credible future misapplication of technology. While there is much wry comedy in these fantastic fables, one is always aware that the various "formal defects" are scrutinized with the same detached lucidity that Levi deployed in his analysis of the perverse human behaviour he saw in the camps. Indeed, he once remarked that Auschwitz itself could be regarded as the most monstrous "vizio di forma" to have besmirched our century.

That Levi was able to study of an Italian university from 1937 to 1941 is in itself significant. It was not in fact until 1938 that Mussolini introduced antisemitic legislation, in a cynical diplomatic gesture designed to appease Hitler. Even though Italy's Jews suffered much hardship as a result, many exemptions and

When the war came, the behaviour of the Italian army was the very opposite of that of the *Wehrmacht*. Despite half-hearted antisemitic laws at home, the Italian army put a stop to the arrest of Jews by Vichy officials in the *départements* which it controlled in south-eastern France. When the Italians withdrew from France, peasant soldiers carried Jewish children in their arms over Alpine passes to prevent their falling into Vichy or Nazi hands. (That many of these children were subsequently rounded up by German troops in Piedmont was no fault of the Italians.) In Croatia and Greece the Italian army also gave substantial help to Jewish refugees. This must be contrasted with the insane determination of the German SS to send every Jew to the gas chambers, no matter what the logistic cost.



Two of Karl Haxen's drawings from his book *Doom* (unnumbered pages, Stockholm: Punapicium, Paperback, Kr 12, 91 7810 684 2).

loopholes remained; students already enrolled in the universities, for example, were entitled to complete their studies. In the five years that preceded Badoglio's capitulation in 1943, Jews living in Italy were subjected to much cruel discrimination and harassment, yet while Italy retained its sovereignty, not a single Jew, whether Italian citizen or foreign (including German and Austrian) refugee, was deported either from Italy or from territory occupied by the Italian army, despite intense Nazi pressure. Only when northern and central Italy were seized by the German army and after the setting up of the so-called Republic of Salò did the martyrdom of Italy's Jews begin in earnest. It was then that Levi fled to the partisans in the mountains of the Val d'Aosta; subsequently, after his arrest, he was handed over to the SS for deportation to Auschwitz.

One of the more heartening, though insufficiently well-known stories to emerge from the turmoil of the Second World War, is the largely successful struggle on the part of the ordinary people of Italy to save not only their Jewish neighbours but also foreign Jewish refugees from the murderous clutches of their Nazi "allies". In fact, almost 85 per cent of Italy's Jews survived. Susan Zuccotti's *The Italians and the Holocaust* is a diligently researched account of the relatively marginal role that antisemitism played in Italian Fascism and of the fate of Italian Jewry from the time of Mussolini's "March on Rome" to the collapse of Nazi Germany. Zuccotti convincingly attributes the absence of an antisemitic tradition in modern Italy to the fact that the Risorgimento, in which Jews played a conspicuous part, established nineteenth-century Liberalism as the dominant political philosophy. It was the Napoleonic era that first brought emancipation, and the restrictions placed upon Jews during the restorationist interlude that preceded unification were perceived as an alien imposition. Italian Jews, because staunchly loyal to the House of Savoy and a surprising number of Jews transferred their patriotism to the Fascist movement in its early years when it was still free of antisemitism. It is somewhat ironic to recall that Mussolini, who had some sympathy for Revisionist Zionism, arranged for training to be given at the Civitavecchia Naval Academy to young Betarist supporters of Zionism, who were later to form the core of the *Yishuv* in Palestine.

Even when all the bridges over the Po had been destroyed, the SS still managed to ferry the Jews across the river in small boats, so that they should not miss their train to Auschwitz.

Despite the conspicuous lack of a moral lead from the Vatican, nuns and parish priests risked, and in many instances gave, their lives to protect Jews. But the common human decency of the majority of Italians seems to have been independent of ideology. *Crabini*, customs officials, even Fascist mayors helped, giving timely warnings, sabotaging membership lists of Jewish communities before they were requisitioned by the SS or simply by looking the other way at the right moment. There is a section of *I sommersi e i salvati* devoted to the letters Levi received from Germany after the publication of the German translation of *Se questo è un uomo*. It was no doubt such simple acts that he had in mind in his reply to one correspondent who sought to excuse German passivity by making the familiar appeal to the severe constraints that exist in a totalitarian state. Levi writes: "I know that it is impossible to rebel in a totalitarian state; but I know that there are innumerable, much less dangerous ways of showing solidarity with the oppressed, and that they occurred frequently in Italy, even after the German occupation, and that in Hitler's Germany they occurred all too rarely." This is far from being the only occasion on which Levi and Zuccotti complement each other: Zuccotti provides the statistics and a balanced summary of the historical background. Levi often succeeds in illuminating the motivations of those who perpetrated some of the monstrous crimes she describes.

Levi's historical novel, *Se non ora quando?* (*If Not Now, When?* TLS, December 3, 1982 and August 22, 1986), portrays a group of Jewish partisans fighting behind the German lines in Russia and eventually making their way to Italy in the hope of starting a new life in Palestine. At the end of the novel there is a chilling scene in which the Yiddish-speaking protagonists are invited to a *soirée* in the elegant home of a member of Milan's Jewish intellectual bourgeoisie. The Italians are gracious and helpful hosts, but there is an almost complete lack of reciprocal comprehension; so different have been their fate as Jews. In a few paragraphs one finds much of the essence of Zuccotti's account elegantly epitomized.

A dying race

Peter Hainsworth

ANDREA ZANZOTTO
Idioma
124pp. Milan: Mondadori. L180,000
88002 8348 1

Now sixty-six years old, Andrea Zanzotto is still the finest poet writing in Italy today. The intellectual and linguistic adventurousness of the 1960s and 70s has waned, and the quest for poetic and moral wholeness is now partly nostalgic. But retrospection does not mean repose. Zanzotto continues to make new poetry from outmoded, apparently insignificant ways of thinking and feeling, to press for real values to set against the dangerous illusions of the present.

Idioma is the third part of what he has called a pseudo-trilogy. Like *Il Galateo in bosco* (1978) and *Poferi* (1983), it is centred on the area of the Veneto where Zanzotto was born and where he has lived almost all his life. As usual the title is emblematic. Etymologically, "idiom" evokes the idea of a private language, perhaps a deprived (idiotic?) one, but it also evokes a way of speaking which is alive, wholesome, idiomatic. The contradictory cluster of associations is simultaneously abstract and quite concrete. The particular idiom is the dialect of Zanzotto's village, Pieve di Soligo, not so long ago a peasant community, now economically enriched, though in other ways much impoverished. Some of the poems in *Idioma* are an overt "Where are they now?" for the inhabitants and the culture of a lost world, part of which is the lost dialect in which the poems are written. Here, within the protected confines of this special language, Zanzotto is at his most touching, his most carefully naive, as in this short poem for an old seamstress:

Si n'è l'è fesse 'n paradiso
apòia par lì, anch' s' paradiso n' ghe n'è

An elusive prince

Dick Davis

ANDREA VITELLO
Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa
488pp. Palermo: Solerio, Paperback,
L28,000

The Leopard – Fabrizio, Prince of Salina – is one of the most powerfully attractive characters in Italian fiction. His proud, disillusioned presence, his relentlessly intelligent and despairing appraisal of human affairs, have about them a glamour, an unqualified grandeur ("una grandezza senza aggettivi"), to use the author's own phrase) hardly to be met with outside of Dante. And an almost comparable glamour has clung to the figure of his elusive creator, Giuseppe Tomasi, Prince of Lampedusa.

In part this has been a result of the stories that have become current about the genesis of *Il gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), undertaken as an attempt to recover the past after the family's palace in Palermo was destroyed, its composition (supposedly in cafés), and its initial rejection by Italy's two most prestigious publishing houses (Mondadori and Einaudi), the news of the latter coming only five days before Lampedusa's death). Andrea Vitello's biography corrects (the novel was not written in cafés; only copied there) but substantially confirms the legends, and packed though it is with facts and the interpretation of facts, it leaves the reader with an even stronger sense than before of Lampedusa's bizarre uniqueness, both as a writer and as an aristocratic survivor into a republican, plebeian world.

Vitello is a Sicilian (born in Palma di Montecarlo, one of the chief sites used by Lampedusa in his novel), and he is particularly illuminating on the intricacies of Sicilian history, society and manners. He is also good on Lampedusa's childhood, especially his relations with his rapid, spoilt father and his mother, highly cultivated mother. Though Lampedusa's family thought of the future novelist as *intelligente ma privo di vitalità* (intelligent but lacking in liveliness), he twice turned to assassination as a young child.

la sarà da mèter a l'inferno
l'istesso Padreterno –
la sarà da mèter a l'inferno
tùta, nua quanna "la realtà"
si par ti no fesse 'n paradiso
pien de bontà come la tó hontà,
gentilero che 'l paradiso
come che ti tu l'è pensà.

(If he did not make a paradise, / specially for you, even if there are no paradises / the Eternal Father himself / should be sent to hell / all, all "reality" / should be sent to hell, / if he did not make a paradise for you, / full of goodness like your goodness, / nothing else but paradise / as you imagined it.)

The scope is not always local: other dialect poems for more famous contemporaries – Pasolini, Montale, but also Charlie Chaplin – return to the civic and political disquiet which has been one of the major foci of Zanzotto's mature work. So the poem for the murdered Pasolini, which begins with more or less precise reminiscences of their different lives in spite of sharing similar beginnings, ends in anguish:

Ah, scòsome, se ades non so darte
altro che 'sto muzhigamènt, 'ramai da vecio . . .
L'è sol che 'n porc s'òròh, tremor,
par pònta-sù, jùstàr-sù in quèlich modo
par un momento sol, par salutarie –
quel che l'è fà del tó os c del tó cor.

(Oh pardon me, if I cannot now give you / anything but this mumbly, in an old man's way now . . . / It is only a poor effort, a trembling, / to stitch together again, to fit together again / – just for a moment, to say good-bye – / what they have done with your bones and your heart.)

Much of *Idioma* is similarly bleak. The First World War (the Italian front having zigzagged across Zanzotto's homeland), and the partisan struggles of the Second remain the most painful proofs of the brutal idiocy of history for Zanzotto, though now supplemented by terrorism, the threat of nuclear war, the mindless-

during the First World War, he was imprisoned by the Austrians – the second time reaching Sicily and home almost on the day of the armistice.

But after this promising opening the book proves to be something of a disappointment. There are, it is true, some fine moments. After the Palermo house is bombed, we are shown Lampedusa's mother living out the last days of her life in its few remaining habitable rooms; she would wander about the ruins, obsessively touching the walls with her finger tips, and the picture puts the reader in mind of her son's own obsessive fingering of his family's irredeemably lost past. But too often the material Vitello offers seems beside the point. He is, for example, extremely reticent about the most important relationship of Lampedusa's life (after that with his mother) – his marriage to Alessandra Wolf. He tells us virtually nothing about Alessandra's first husband, or about the circumstances of her divorce from him in order to marry Lampedusa, or about how all three managed to remain, outwardly at least, good friends. (The shadowiness of Alessandra's presence in the book may be due to the fact that, as Vitello sets out in some lengthy and self-justifying footnotes, she came actively to distrust his attempts to record and interpret her husband's life and writings.)

The biographer's sense of proportion seems fatally defective; while he will pass quickly over such crucial personal events as Lampedusa's courtship and marriage, he catalogues in detail the minutiae of wills, doctor's reports, financial transactions, etc. The reality of the man disappears in a storm of statistics and facts that tell us little that we wish to know. At one point Vitello records Lampedusa's strictures on Italian literature: between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, that it lacked all sense of a specific *concreto* (concrete reality) and this is precisely what too much of this book lacks. The attempt to be objective and scientific (Vitello is a doctor, a psychoanalyst) would seem, by profession too often reduces his subject to medical and legal data. And where within it is the man, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, the individual who wrote one of the finest novels of the twentieth century?

ness of consumerism. But, as always, Zanzotto works to undermine the negatives, positing a poetry of pleasure in which even violence can become pastoral idyll. One of the poems in Italian, for instance, stems from the arms race. It begins:

Corsu non affaticata, n' qui, a dove mai,
dei colori, disimmescat cangianza,
che pur non abbandona
mai nessuno abbandona –
E autorizza chiunque, oltre ogni chiunque,
a parlare con vivi e alterati
Aprite, colori, le dolcezze
del percorso che non è affatto percorso
perché è al futuro di tutti i percorsi

(No wearied race, to here, to nowhere at all, / de-fused changefulness of colours, / which yet never leaves off, no one ever leaves off – / And it authorizes anyone, over every anyone / to speak with the living and those who are in a changed state / Open, colours, the sweetnesses / of the course which is not at all run / because it belongs to the future of all courses which are run.)

The lines patter forwards, turning off officialise upside-down, courting childish nonsense, inviting participation more than interpretation, refusing to have any truck with any system of power, even if it is only the power of stable meanings. In the somewhere, or nowhere, of poetry the absurdities of death and isolation might just be overcome. Here, the poem seems to say, an idiom is imaginable which, for all its poverty, is ultimately as rich as any we can imagine.

Idioma is not as exciting as some of Zanzotto's work, or as fertile and satisfying as, say, *Il Galateo in bosco*, but, aside from the deliberate obstacle of dialect, it contains some of his most approachable poems. Overall, it combines tradition and modernism, high intellectualism and the simplest of human feelings is constantly changing ratios. Zanzotto is still exploring new paths in his by now familiar territory. It is worth following him down almost all of them.

Vitello's answer would probably be that the man is to be found in his interpretations of Lampedusa's writings. These are almost entirely psychoanalytic in nature and appear to be either so obvious as to be banal and hardly worth recording, or to be tendentious and indemonstrable. Almost never during the second section of the book, which is devoted to a psychoanalytic exposition of *Il gattopardo* and the short story "Lighoa", did I feel that I was brought close to the reality of Lampedusa's mind and intelligence. My constant impression was that the subject of this biography was so much more intelligent, canny, and humanly aware than his biographer, that the biographer's attempts to characterize him had not a snowball's chance in hell of success. Vitello has some good insights (Lampedusa's aristocratic turning of *ira* to *ironia* – anger to irony – for example), but one has to suffer many pages of exasperatingly vague rhetoric in order to come on them. Strangely, too, the interpretation of *Il gattopardo* is Freudian, whereas that of "Lighoa" is Jungian. And Vitello comes close to saying that these two quite divergent systems should be taken as of equal validity, hazily applicable as the analyst wishes, which would seem to reduce the whole psychoanalytic interpretation of literature to the level of a diverting game, in no sense an attempt to come to any kind of underlying truth about either the work or its author.

Nevertheless Vitello does give us some things that are worth having – a convincing portrait of the young Lampedusa, some indicative anecdotes about Lampedusa's family. In particular and Sicilian society in general, a careful documentation of how and why *Il gattopardo* was initially rejected by Mondadori and Einaudi. The book is intermittently moving and persuasive; but there is certainly still room for a good biography of Lampedusa. A bellowing account of the mind that produced *Il gattopardo* has yet to be written.

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Rigours of the ideal

William J. R. Curtis

WOLF TEGETHOFF
Mies van der Rohe: The villas and country houses
223pp. New York: Museum of Modern Art; distributed by MIT Press. £54.95.
01262 20050.3
FRANZ SCHULZE
Mies van der Rohe: A critical biography
355pp. University of Chicago Press in association with the Mies van der Rohe Archive of the Museum of Modern Art. £28.96.
01226 74059.5

Mies van der Rohe has often been imitated but rarely understood. All over the world there are crude glass boxes which mimic the superficialities of his style but fail to reproduce the proportion, the craft and the intent classicism of the originals. The essentials of his art defy easy categorization. They lie at the level of a subliminal sense of order rooted in an idealistic view of the world. Mies alluded to this when he spoke of his obsession with the "higher unity" between nature, man and architecture.

The early chroniclers of modern architecture slotted Mies van der Rohe into their own various scenarios: the fusion of art and industry; the expression of the *Zeitgeist* in a new kind of space; the definition of an "International Style". In the process they mislaid something of his uniqueness and overlooked his profound debts to tradition. As a result the "official Mies" of the 1950s was a desiccated creature, all I-beams and steel skeletons. Before his death in 1969 some of his followers came close to making his example into a species of modern neudeity. They reproduced the letter but not the spirit.

The reaction against Mies began soon after his death and did little to distinguish him from his dullest imitators. His reductionism was rejected as being too restrictive. He was accused of being insensitive to urban context and blind to the enrichments of history. The Miesian dictum "Less is more" was turned on its head by Robert Venturi (the author of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, 1966) to become "Less is a bore". The ground was thus prepared for the post-modernist demonology which treated Mies as one of the chief villains, as if he had created the wilderness of the contemporary city all on his own. The Seagram Building in New York was lumped together with the worst of speculative development. Mies was accused of "not communicating" to the man in the street because his architecture was "too abstract". Old realist arguments were served up in new semiological bottles.

Neither the standard modernist rhetoric nor the more recent post-modernist propaganda deals effectively with a figure of these historical dimensions. If Mies has long-range relevance it is precisely because he touched upon architectural values which transcend period and style. Clearly some of his propositions were too exclusive, but the best of his individual buildings possess a presence and strength of form that stop the observer short. In turn this strength relied upon a rich world of content related to Mies's vision of the way things ought to be. It is scarcely relevant to go on blaming modernism for not having delivered the utopian goods - a hit like kicking a cathedral for not providing the keys to heaven. Architecture produces idealizations of the social state. It is not sufficient then to examine Mies's architecture by formal or functional criteria alone; and it is obviously silly to fault him for not fitting with current fashions. His work possesses a special probity. When approaching the Barcelona Pavilion or the Tugendhat House or Lake Shore Apartments we do well to reflect on Shelley's phrase: "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence".

The best antidote to critical rhetoric is accurate history. Both books under review make extensive use of the documents, letters, photographs and sketches now stored in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. But the scale of the studies is different. Wolf Tegethoff, concentrating on a limited number of houses, Franz Schulze reviewing the artist's entire life and career. Taken together these two books do much to underline the circumstances of Mies that have been current, it is

entirely to the credit of both authors that neither has wasted time kowtowing to this or that critical school of thought.

Tegethoff's *Mies van der Rohe: The villas and country houses* is a painstaking analysis of twenty-one projects, starting with the Concrete Country House of 1921-4 and finishing with the Farnsworth House of 1945-51. By some odd but happy quirk the Barcelona Pavilion of 1929 is also included, although this was not a dwelling but a constructed piece of international diplomacy. Tegethoff assembles numerous written sources and sketches to reconstruct something of the social context and design process of each house. The result is a sort of elevated *catalogue raisonné* rather than a work of profound historical synthesis, and one is not surprised to learn that the original German edition of the book (published in 1981) was a PhD thesis. Tegethoff takes us through some of the well-known Miesian buildings and leaves us with a much clearer understanding of the architect's intentions. By looking into the design process it is possible to gauge the inevitable compromises between the ideal and the pragmatic. On occasion this approach also reveals new levels of meaning. The "sliding planes" and shifted axes of the Barcelona Pavilion, for example, were ingeniously adjusted to features in the setting, and the honourific materials, as well as the restrained classicism, were in part responses to the building's symbolic function: the King of Spain was actually received in the Pavilion and the famous Barcelona Chair (now found in bank lobbies world-wide) actually functioned originally as a throne. In short the Pavilion was a demonstration building in a very complete sense: a show-piece of German virtues; a manifesto of a new architecture; and a radical re-examination of certain fundamentals of classicism.

It is odd that Tegethoff starts his study as late as the 1920s because he thereby excludes Mies's formative years, when he designed a number of houses of striking quality under neo-classical inspiration. He thus misses a chance to show how Mies actually distilled a number of villa typologies in his later "modern" works. Much remains to be done in defining the generic patterns in the architect's vocabulary. But while the strength of the book lies in its detail, the author does introduce tantalizing interpretations which one only wishes he had developed further, as when he refers to Pliny's descriptions of the ideal villa life or to Mies's obsession with linking interiors to the infinite space of nature which, thus framed, revealed an ineffable, spiritual dimension. Tegethoff clearly realizes that there is a sort of mythical content at work in the architecture of Mies van der Rohe, but his dead-hand PhD methodology is not the right tool for revealing it. As it is, he has supplied some solid, scholarly building-blocks that be or someone else may eventually use to make a more comprehensive structure.

Schulze's *Mies van der Rohe: A critical biography* is obviously broader in scope as it treats of the artist's life as well as most of his works. To do this he has to work back and forth from private life to political culture in Wilhelmine Germany, the Weimar period, the Nazi years and the United States of the 1940s, 50s and 60s. On the whole he does not do too badly, though he makes a better job of the beginning than at the end, when he lapses rather frequently into anecdotes - for instance, about Mies's drinking habits.

The difficult part of any biography of an artist is to know how the life and the art interact. Here Schulze is perhaps not adventurous enough in hypothesizing how Mies may have transformed experience into symbolic forms - though a failed effort in this direction would certainly have undermined the book's otherwise sound virtues. As a result of this hesitation the book sometimes reads as two different ones which intertwine without always connecting: one, the tale of the man, his life, loves, financial worries, clients etc; the other, a biography of his buildings. The analyses of the buildings sometimes lack freshness, though Schulze is to be commended for having consulted many of the primary written sources and for having done his best to understand the desires of the various patrons.

Earlier treatments of Mies van der Rohe were either stilted or else merely about the

artist's formative years, but Schulze does a fine job in tracing the impact of Schinkel and Behrens, and in portraying the rapid social climb of this taciturn yet elegant young man. The ideological complexities of the 1920s are also handled subtly, though here one wishes for more discussion of Mies's probable debts to other architects such as Le Corbusier (one doubts that the Tugendhat would have come out quite the way it did without the Villa Stein de Monzie at Garches). The 1930s was always the neglected decade in earlier histories, but Schulze ploughs on through the many superb unexecuted projects of this period. We are still left guessing, though, about the architect's attitude to Nazism: did he regard it as a menace or merely as a tedious inconvenience?

Schulze is well placed to deal with the Chicago years and he does so in very considerable detail. In the process a number of the big questions tend to be submerged: did Mies sense any inherent conflict between his own idealism and the base concerns of American commercialism? Did he have much idea about the special American perspectives on the classical tradition? What did he really think about the Chicago School, the American city, the American landscape? In short, how was his vision enriched, or jolted, by his move at such a late age to a foreign land?

But this is certainly not to accuse Schulze of backing away from interpretations. He obviously knows Mies very well and is aware of bad points as well as good. He rightly realizes that it makes no sense to look at this architect without understanding his attraction towards metaphysical speculation, yet he spares us the embarrassing error of equating architectural content with excerpts of philosophical texts which the artist happened to hold dear: "His place in history is assured not so much by the infallibility of his thinking as by the subtlety and refinement of his art. Even so, that art was dependent on the concentrated mental rigor to which he forever subjected it."

Both Tegethoff and Schulze have produced elegantly designed books which add considerably to our understanding of Mies van der Rohe. He was a far more complex figure than either his admirers or his denigrators have suggested. But there is still much more to be done. It might be useful to describe the architect's family of forms, to show how generic themes were transformed, to explain more fully how tradition was translated; or to examine a single project in even more detail, thus unravelling the connections between ideas and forms. Then there is the virtually uncharted field of Mies's world-wide influence, which is, in fact, extremely varied. As well as the obvious derivations in the field of skyscraper design it includes regional transformations of the architect's house ideas by others in Mexico, California, Australia and Japan.

Every generation re-examines its forefathers. Today it is only the popular press and the odd prince that still believe Mies produced ugly glass boxes. The pop classicists have already undermined their own case with grotesque pastiches of historical elements which trivialize the past and give nothing to the present or the future. Mies is once again being valued for his intellectual discipline, his firm sense of order and his deep intuition of classicism. He penetrated beyond the outer level of style to the substructures within. When the last punk post-modern keystone has long since crumbled into a pile of pink dust, Mies van der Rohe will stand: a sentinel of principle.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair (and stool), and also his earlier tubular-steel Weissenhof chair, are subjects of two of the photographs in Michael Collins's *Towards Post-Modernism: Design since 1851* (176pp., with 16 colour and 149 black-and-white illustrations. British Museum. Paperback, £8.95, 0 7141 1548 1). Mies's work features in the central chapter, "Form without Ornament: The Mollam style", of five, which begin with "Ornament on Everything: The Whip-lash: Art Nouveau" and end with "Pop and Liquor: The 1950s", to end with "Pop and Liquor: The 1950s". There are added, after a brief "Conclusion", an "A-Z of Artists and Designers" containing biographical notes on 120 subjects, from the unprejudiced Alvar Aalto to Eva Zeisel.

Between Europe and Asia

Paul Cartledge

GRAHAM SHIPLEY
A History of Samos 800-188 ac
352pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £35.
019 814868.2

IN 1979, with the prospect of Greece's entry into the EEC looming, a Greek commentator wrote feelingly in *The Times* that his countrymen "from as long ago as the Andalkidean Peace have had a tradition of connecting solutions of internal problems with foreigners", "in a way", he added ruefully, "that historically may not have been necessary". Like Louis XVIII's courtiers, the Greeks have clearly forgotten nothing; the agreement, more usually known as the Peace of Antalkidas or King's Peace, was concluded in 387/6 ac, a mere 2,370-odd years ago.

Yet in an important sense the commentator was quite right to retrogress that far. For this was not just a Peace of ancient history but a moment in one of the longest-running problems of world history: where and how to draw the line between Europe and Asia. The Aegean island of Samos, as Graham Shipley's

handsome book perfectly illustrates, was destined by geography and history to be almost literally central to that problem for most of his chosen period. Not only did it lie just a couple of kilometres off the coast of western Anatolia, but it laid usually successful claim to a sizeable chunk of the mainland opposite. Dr Shipley devotes to this Asiatic *peraea* the attention and respect that its historical significance demands.

A *History of Samos 800-188 ac* is therefore partly a regional study, and surely few natives can have inspected as much of Samos's 490 square kilometres as this indefatigable Englishman. But it is also a political history, in the precise sense that it is a history of the *polis* of Samos; and this was constituted in the peculiar manner of the ancient Greek city-state, by a symbiotic union of town and rural territory. Which in its turn means that this is necessarily a social and economic history, too, a tale of pottery and population as well as politics and prosopography.

Writing such histories of individual ancient towns was, however, anathematized by the late Sir Moses Finley as "a *cul de sac*, given the limits of the available (and potential) documentation, the unalterable condition of the study of ancient history". Shipley throughout

shows himself conscious, at times almost painfully so, of these limits. In his anxiety to narrate a comprehensive story in temporal sequence he accumulates and re-presents virtually every available scrap of literary testimony, however unreliable, trivial or chronologically insecure.

This defect, it must be said at once, is outweighed by the book's many merits. Among these I would stress particularly two: exemplary use of archaeological data, and chronological scope. The spade may owe its incurable truthfulness to its inability to speak, but there are other ways of procuring archaeological evidence besides the digging so admirably conducted by the German Archaeological Institute at the sanctuary of Hera and other Samian sites since 1910. Shipley's extensive fieldwalking is one of these. One hopes that his solo efforts will stimulate the enthusiasm and funds required for an intensive, team survey of the kind that in recent years has borne such abundant fruit in Greek lands, most relevantly on the Cycladic island of Melos. Statements like "There is no evidence for sizes of landholdings" may then happily have to be revised.

As for chronological scope, most histories of ancient Greece almost ritually terminate somewhere in the fourth century ac (*experio creditur*). Shipley crosses traditional periodizations by continuing beyond the virtual rebirth of the Samian *polis* in 322 (since 386 it had been deprived of its *peraea* under the terms of the King's Peace, and had been forcibly taken over by Athens in 365) into the high Hellenistic epoch. He has interesting things to say in his preface about the ideologies behind the scholarly neglect of Samian history. The relative neglect of all Hellenistic Greek history, a research topic in its own right, is far more grave. Shipley's chapters on the politics, economy and society of Hellenistic Samos (here taken as running from 322 to the Peace of Apameia) add momentum to what seems to be a current of recuperation.

Apart from a twenty-page site catalogue and a valuable series of technical appendices and addnotes, most of the book comprises a chronologically ordered account of Samian history from the emergence of the *polis* and acquisition of the *peraea* in the eighth and seventh centuries, through the Archaic splen-

dours of the Alakid tyrant dynasty in the sixth century, to the chequered pattern of domestic turmoil punctuated by foreign intervention or occupation that dominates the Classical and Hellenistic picture. The history of a territory that produced individuals like the dynast Polykrates and the mystic intellectual Pythagoras (though Samos was not big enough for both of them), the hedonist Epicurus and the pioneer heliocentrist Aristarchos, and that attracted temporary residents of the calibre of Anacreon and Herodotus, could scarcely be dull. Shipley does it full justice.

Shipley's qualitative emphasis on trade as a catalyst of political and social change in early Samos is not misplaced, and his estimate of its and the *peraea*'s role in intensifying aristocratic competition is nice. Several pages are properly devoted to the wondrous "Polykrates works" of the sixth century, especially the great harbour mole at ancient Samos town fonce known humbly as Tighani or "frying-pan" but since 1955 - *sic transit gloria* - as "Pythagoras-ville") and the remarkable tunnel designed to channel water into the town for over a kilometre from outside the massive contemporary fortification walls built of local marble. His discussion of the vexed and important question of whether Athens (re-)instilled a democratic régime after the Samian revolt of 440-439 is a model of judicious argument - and sardonic humour, surely, in the relevant appendix that lists some "items of evidence to be classed as 'non-arguments'". Finally, his plausible interpretation of what he terms "the most interesting economic document from Samos", the inscribed Corn Law of c.200, reveals it to be not strictly an economic measure at all but one designed to serve the cultural rather than practical purpose of enhancing the quality of life.

Shipley's monograph, though not exactly holiday reading, cannot fail to instruct the intrepid traveller undismayed by detecting "The Army Command of Samos" tucked away among Shipley's many duly acknowledged benefactors. In any case, when the reading gets tough, there is always the tried and trusted specific of Lord Byron to bring good cheer: first "Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!", then "Dash down your cup of Samian wine!" Repeat as necessary or desired.

A Cautionary Tale

In contemplation at the café:
a dazed young man out of Cavafy.

'th a poet nearing his twenty-fifth year',
gone from bankrupt to millionaire

In the small white hours of Eros.
He walks into a morning of promise

and sunlight, with a world-including smile,
started to find business as usual

and on his body the surplus greatcoat
from the hopeless months, with the torn pocket

where coins disappeared in the lining . . .
The same body too, not hunching along

this morning though, but cock of the walk,
the lover tolerant of discourteous traffic.

exuding all the benevolence
of a man whose work has been praised, once.

in the press . . . Now he occupies his zenith
In the café; but the waiter's brisk cloth

is applied to the next-door table,
change is ceaseless and imperceptible,

the world is moving round him in his dream,
but the world is moving on without him.

STEPHEN ROMER

The earliest art

Christopher Chippindale

JEAN ABÉLANET
Signes sans parole: Cent siècles d'art rupestre en Europe occidentale
345pp. Paris: L'Asiétique, 195fr.

Art has always had a special role in the investigations of French prehistory. The "mobiliary art", found carved on small portable objects in the caves, was crucial in showing that Europe was peopled in the Ice Age, not just by brutes, but by people with recognizably human qualities. This optimistic view was radically confirmed by the discovery of the Palaeolithic paintings on the walls of caves like Altamira and Niaux.

France has kept a leading place in the study of prehistoric art, from the grandest of the old masters, the Abbé Breuil with his theories of sympathetic hunting magic, to André Leroi-Gourhan, the structuralist wizard who saw in the placing of images a pattern of matched pairs that was symbolic of gender opposition.

Archaic foragings

Norman Hammond

STUART J. FIDEL
Prehistory of the Americas
300pp. Cambridge University Press, £30 (paperback, £10.95).
0521327733

American archaeology has been shamefully neglected in Britain. A recent survey of university departments of archaeology showed that there is just one lecturer-level position to cover the prehistory and historic archaeology of the entire New World. The British Museum has one of the finest, largest and longest-established collections of pre-Columbian material in the world, with especially good Aztec and Maya holdings; but there is not even a Sub-Department of American Antiquities there – the whole lot is the responsibility of a single Assistant Keeper in the Department of Ethnography.

In the face of this, it is heartening to find a major university press producing an introductory textbook on American archaeology. Stuart J. Fidel writes clearly, and mentions almost all the important finds and theories that lie behind our present understanding of prehistoric cultures. The initial migrations into the New World, the terminal Pleistocene gathering-hunting bands of the Paleo-Indian period, the Archaic foragers who parallel in time and economic strategy much of the European Mesolithic, and the origins of farming and sedentary village life are all discussed competently. Fidel is an unashamed conservative when it comes to the ultimate origins of American society, sticking to a proven entry through Alaska later than 14,000 years ago, although proclaiming himself open to conver-

But the routing is also being made elsewhere, especially in South Africa, where David Lewis-Williams, Patricia Vinnicombe, John Parkington and others have the benefit of ethnographical records of the San people from which to gain insights into the making of exquisite images on African rock-shelter walls. And there are in Australia, as well as in southern Africa, cave-paintings nearly as match in age the more famous ones of Europe.

In Europe, so much remarkable prehistoric art lies within the modern territory of France that the patristic geographical focus of Jean Abélanet's book does no great harm. Its title echoes Breuil's *Quatre cents siècles d'art pariétal* though it has no reason to abbreviate the record to a mere 100 centuries, since Abélanet also reckons the characteristic animal art of the Palaeolithic to date back to 25/30,000 years ago. But there is only one chapter on this, the first golden age of Western art, and one on its successor, the "art nouveau" of the Neolithic farmers. The rest of the book, in six chapters, takes the story up to, and perhaps into, historic times: the megaliths and the art of early metal-working communities in Iberia, religious art in

Spain should recent discoveries such as the Pedra Furada caves in Brazil really demonstrate a human presence before 35,000 years ago, and already being half-inclined to accept the early dates for Monte Verde in Chile. His inclusion of this very recent material is an indication of the care and interest which he has given to the earlier societies he writes about.

He is less accomplished when it comes to the complex societies of Mesoamerica and South America which arise after 2000 ac and reached their apogee in the civilizations of the Maya, Mexico and Inca. Important books such as Flannery and Marcus's *The Cloud People* pass unmentioned. Meso sites such as Palenque are defined as "huge primary regional centres" in the early sixth century when they were at the most modest townships, and there are a num-

Pre-conquest perspectives

Aubrey Burl

TIMOTHY DARVILL
Prehistoric Britain
223pp. Batsford, £19.95 (paperback, £12.95).
0713431793

Prehistoric Britain by Tim Darvill is certainly ambitious, aiming to examine human societies in Britain up to the Roman Conquest through the available archaeological evidence. General accounts of prehistoric Britain are rare, good ones even rarer. Aware of the vastness of the subject more archaeologists have preferred to discuss particular periods, regions, sites or artefacts. Even the broader works have concentrated on aspects such as the social background (Richard Bradley), or themes (Graham Clark), or have used several contributors (Colin Renfrew *et al.*). Vincent Megaw and Derek Simpson have tackled the problem head-on, producing a handbook useful for undergraduates but deterringly detailed for the general reader.

Developing material gathered for extramural lectures, Timothy Darvill has mainly succeeded in producing "a coherent overview of prehistory" for a wider public. His is a clear and readable review of the changes that occurred in Britain (not Ireland, which is hardly noticed at all, sometimes in the detriment of the explanations of metal-working or ritual impacts) from 450,000 ac to ad 77. To compress so much into fewer than 200 pages of text has led inevitably to superficiality. Even for the 4,000 years between the start of the Neolithic and the end of the Iron Age the narrative races along at a century every three pages. But briefly, paradoxically, has created clarity, and the simplicity of the explanations will benefit the beginner in prehistoric studies. A serious criticism, however, must be levelled at Darvill's allotment of twenty-seven pages to the thousand years of the Neolithic and twenty-three pages to fifty years of the late Iron Age.

the Iberian manner in southern France, the carved statue-menhirs of France and Italy, the pecked figures high on Mont Bego in the French Alps and along the Camonica valley in the Italian Alps, and finally the sketchy, scratched figures of "L'art linéaire" of proto-historic France.

Signes sans paroles follows the design and layout of its series "La Mémoire du Temps": an unillustrated text alternates with separate groups of line-figures and half-tones – an antique style of presentation that does the subject, and M Abélanet's fine text, no good at all. And there is no index.

It is most refreshing to have the later styles, especially the *finénes* whose study is one of Abélanet's own specialties, given a prominence to match the palaeolithic. Detailed information is always given, and some credible attempt made at interpretation within the framework of art, and especially religious art, as a universal of human culture. This is the main tradition of study for prehistoric art in Europe, and the one of which Abélanet has given us, within his defined geographical region, a good synthesis.

her of specific errors of fact which betoken unfamiliarity and misreading of the secondary sources on which Fidel has relied.

The most serious fault of the book, although one understandable and perhaps forgivable in a general text, is precisely this lack of use of original material: the entire bibliography contains not a single reference to the vast Spanish-language literature on the archaeology of Latin America, and virtually none of the European coverage. Only North American sources are used, and these include popular magazine rehashes. We are a long way from Gordon Willey's *Introduction to American Archaeology* (1966, 1971) with its magisterial review of primary sources for the archaeology of the entire continent, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego.

To imply that we have only the sketchiest knowledge of the Neolithic but immeasurably more of the years immediately before the Roman invasions is misleading.

The book is well illustrated, providing a graphic account of the development of its prehistoric societies. There are helpful diagrams for pottery and metal typologies, including a succinct résumé of beaker ceramics and funerary associations. The seventy-two black-and-white photographs are mostly rather dark but the plans and drawings are excellent. The ten full-page distribution maps of Great Britain, ranging in subject from Mesolithic shell-midens to Late Iron Age tribal groupings, are outstanding, revealing regional patterns and preferences in a simple and effective manner.

There are mistakes. Charles II was not a king in the 1640s; it is the bank, not the ditch, that is obliterated at Stenness; and the name *curcus* does not derive from nineteenth-century notions but from the "curious and maggoty" brain of William Stukeley, c1723. But these are trivial blemishes. With its emphasis on subsistence, technology, ritual, trade, society and population, and with a wide-ranging bibliography and index, Darvill's book provides a pleasant introduction to the story of British prehistory, particularly of the five centuries before the coming of the Romans.

Origins: The roots of European Civilisation (198pp. BBC, £16.95, 0563205431), edited by Barry Cunliffe, is a collection of essays by ten archaeologists to mark the tenth anniversary of Radio 4's series on archaeology, "Origins". The contributors include "Island Origins" by John Cherry, "Crete: the Minoans and their Gods" by Peter Warren, "Neolithic Lake Villages of France" by John Howell, "Left hand and the Greek Dark Age" by Mervyn Popham, "Carthage: The Punic City" by Henry Hurst and three essays by Cunliffe himself, on "Aegean civilisation, cities and states and the transformation of Europe and 'Wine for the Barbarians'".

In their bones

Juliet Clutton-Brock

SIMON J. M. DAVIS
The Archaeology of Animals
224pp. Batsford, £25.95 (paperback, £14.95).
0713445718

Digging up the past is nowadays only a small part of archaeology, and the professional excavator is unlikely to be familiar with all the techniques used by physicists, chemists and biologists in interpreting the finds. A large proportion of these finds consists of bones or shells that remain in the soil as the garbage from ancient meals and, within the past thirty years, their study has grown into a rigorous research discipline. *The Archaeology of Animals* is about this subject of archaeozoology. It is written with an ease and freedom from technical language that bring to mind the writings of an older generation of archaeologists. Simon J. M. Davis shows that although archaeology has become a science it can still be as fascinating and intriguing as in the days of Mortimer Wheeler and Glyn Daniel.

The book begins with a short history of the study of animals in archaeology, summarises the methods used and provides a well-illustrated account of the composition of bones and teeth. It continues with chapters on the reconstruction of past environments from the identification of animal remains and the interpretation of the seasons at which sites were occupied. There is a final section on the history of animal exploitation in Britain.

One of the earliest studies quoted is from the excavations of the Mount Carmel cave (now in Israel), carried out by Dorothy Garrod before the Second World War. The animal remains of the late Pleistocene revealed an alternation in high numbers of fallow deer, which inhabit a temperate environment, and gazelle, which prefer a more arid climate. Dorothea Bate, who analysed these remains, suggested that the numbers of deer and gazelle reflected changes in climate associated with the end of the last Ice Age, and finds from further excavations have supported this view.

The latest level in the excavations at Mount Carmel was the Natufian (equivalent to the Mesolithic of Europe), which was a crucial period, around 11,000 years ago, when humans began to change from living as nomadic hunters to agriculturalists. It appears that settlement in "villages" began in the Natufian and that this was followed by the early cultivation of cereals, with the domestication of animals following a millennium or so later. In a recent study on the gazelle remains from sites in Israel, Davis had found evidence to support the claim for settlement. By measuring the teeth of gazelles from two Palaeolithic sites, the Aurignacian levels at the Hayonim cave, he was able to show that the animals had been killed within a restricted period when they were quite young, which may indicate that the sites were winter camps for the Palaeolithic hunters. From the Natufian terrace outside the Hayonim cave, however, the gazelle teeth showed that they had been killed at a much wider spread of ages, and therefore all the year round, suggesting that the site had become a permanent habitation.

In order to understand patterns of human settlement it is often necessary to study animals at the present day. A remarkable example of this is described for fish remains from Mesolithic sites on the Scottish island of Orkney in the Hebrides. M. Wilkinson, who carried out the investigations, fished for salmon off Orkney at different times of the year and dissected out the otoliths, or ear bones. From these he could determine the rate of growth and could relate the size of the otoliths with the time of year. This enabled Wilkinson to interpret the otoliths from four Mesolithic sites on Orkney and he was able to show that fishing had taken place in a sequence lasting for a few months at each site over the year, with the most sheltered site being fished in the winter.

Simon Davis has produced an excellent account of the more intriguing investigations carried out on animal remains from archaeological sites. It will fascinate all who are interested in changes in the human environment and, as an exposition on interpretation, it should be read by every archaeologist.

Life on the wing

John Buxton

SALIM ALI
The Fall of a Sparrow
265pp. Oxford University Press, £10.
0195618378

The sparrow which fell to the air-gun of the ten-year-old Salim Ali in the outskirts of Bombay "looked like any other female sparrow except that it had a yellow patch on the throat, like a curry stain". The boy's curiosity was aroused and an uncle, who was one of the earliest members of the Bombay Natural History Society, gave him an introduction to the Honorary Secretary of the Society, W. S. Millard, who at once identified it as a Yellow-throated sparrow and encouraged his young visitor by showing him skins in the Society's collection, and lending him books. "I believe", he says, "it was at this moment that my curiosity about birds really clicked", and so led to a long life spent in interesting others in the birds of his country. His books include some on particular areas, especially in the Himalayas, of which *Indian Hill Birds* (1949) covers the widest area, and more general books, of which the best known is *The Book of Indian Birds*, which has grown from 183 species in the first edition of 1941 to 280 species in the latest. (My own copy, of 1972, describes 264 species, so the

rate of growth seems to be slowing down.) These books have been followed by the monumental *Hindbook* (Compact edition 1983) in which he had Dillon Ripley as collaborator.

The Book of Indian Birds must have done more than anything else to encourage a wider interest in birds among the inhabitants of India and Pakistan, where Salim Ali was very much a pioneer. No one has contributed more than he has to our understanding of the avifauna of the Indian subcontinent – a huge task, for the *Hindbook* describes well over 2,000 species and subspecies, many of which still remain very little known. He has won a world-wide reputation as a scientific ornithologist, but in all his writing about birds his delight in them shines out: they are not skins in museum drawers but living animals with habits and behaviour worthy of study.

Salim Ali's achievement may seem all the more remarkable in these days of "professional" ornithologists in that he never had a science degree; but he feels that this "saved him from becoming a fossilized bureaucrat". Anyone who reads his writing, whether in the *Hindbook* or in this autobiography, must feel that such a fate was denied him by his lively personality and sense of humour. He is always generous with his gratitude to those who have helped him throughout life, from the uncle and aunt who looked after him when he lost both



Richer's biography of a Phalarope, originally published in *A Monograph of Phalaropes*, is reproduced here from John Gould Birdman by Maureen Lambourne (112pp. Photo. £8.95).

his parents before he was three years old, to those who helped him to earn his living in Burma and elsewhere, and those who encouraged his interest in ornithology. These include many famous names: Richard Meinertzhagen, with whom he visited Afghanistan in 1937, and who regarded him as a "risky seditionist", Hugh Whistler and others in India; David Lack; and the man he calls his guru, Erwin

Stresemann. This autobiography records the life not only of a great ornithologist but of a humane and humorous man, whose philosophy is that of George Santayana: "There is no cure for birth or death save to enjoy the interval." This he has certainly done, helped by happy family relationships, and by a devoted wife; and he has helped many others to enjoy it too.

For desk and field

R. W. Ashford

CHRISTOPHER PERRINS
Birds of Britain and Europe
320pp. Collins. Paperback, £6.95.
000197685

Since the first field guide to the birds of Britain and Europe, published in 1954, a truly remarkable standard has been reached in successive works. Illustrations have been miniaturized, emphasizing the diagnostic features; descriptions have been pruned to the bare essentials and the process has been self-generating as more skilled observers have produced more accurate observations. Today, a volume scarcely larger than a pocket diary is an excellent guide to the identification of British birds. On the other hand, larger volumes have developed the popular presentation of scientific natural history into a profession in its own right.

Collins have played an active part in both of

these developments, not only for birds but for many other animal and plant groups, and now, under the general editorship of Sir David Attenborough, they have started a "New Generation" series which combines, in the format of the early field guides, the information required for identification and a potted natural history as well. Christopher Perrins, who has written the bird volume, is director of the Edward Grey Institute for Field Ornithology in Oxford. In a distinguished career he has numerous scientific papers to his credit as well as a string of popular books, from an erudite monograph on British larks to a comprehensive *Encyclopaedia of Birds*.

Part One of *Birds of Britain and Europe* describes in some detail the anatomy of birds and discusses structure and function. A concise essay on origins fortunately ignores those who consider *Archaeopteryx* to be a fake, and the excellent discussion of evolution and speciation is mercifully free from creationist argument. Part Two is the field guide. The use of codes and abbreviations, annoying in them-

selves, does allow the inclusion of additional information such as reproductive statistics. Good maps show the summer and winter distributions of each species. This section depends largely on the quality of the illustrations, and these are of a high order, if the birds are rather garish. More plumages are shown than is usual, and though the pictures (almost all to the page in some cases) are tiny, they are not cramped, and can be readily compared. The field guide section is quite adequate for the identification of wild and feral birds of Europe including Britain, but migrant species are generally excluded.

However, the originality of the work lies in Part Three, which is, effectively, a series of essays on the life cycle, behaviour and ecology of birds. A great deal of information is comfortably compressed into 110 pages, with numerous illustrations. These well written, authoritative chapters extend the reader's interest and knowledge far beyond mere identification. In many instances, areas of ignorance are highlighted, and this is refreshing, but

Island extinctions

Christopher Perrins

DOUGLAS H. PRATT, PHILLIP L. BRUNER and DELVYNG BERRETT
A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific
409pp. Guildford; Princeton University Press, £33.50.
0691084025
PETER HARRISON
Seabirds of the World: A photographic guide
317pp. Bromley: Helm. Paperback, £15.95.
0747014019

A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific covers all the birds of an enormous area of the Pacific and its islands, from Ducie in the east to Palau in the west (though not large land masses such as New Guinea, adequately covered in another recent Princeton work, Bruce M. Beehler *et al.*, *Birds of New Guinea*, reviewed in *The TLS*, December 5, 1986).

Small, oceanic islands are of great interest to the zoologist. Because of their isolation many of the birds have evolved differences from those elsewhere; often they have become separate species or subspecies. Because of the small size of the islands, the populations of birds are small, and small populations are much more vulnerable to extinction than large ones. The arrival of man and concomitant changes in the habitats, the introduction of predators such as

rats or competing bird species all pose threats to these small populations. Quite a number of species are known to have become extinct in this region and, soberingly, Table Six in this guide lists no fewer than eighty species or island race of birds that are considered to be endangered.

Another factor may also have contributed importantly to the losses that have already occurred. These isolated populations seem to have been vulnerable to diseases brought in by the new arrivals – in the same way that man virtually wiped out the local human inhabitants by bringing measles. For example, when Europeans first arrived in the Hawaiian Islands there was a rich fauna of native birds, many of which have since become extinct; this may have come about through insect-borne diseases – the Europeans introduced mosquitoes. What is not mentioned in the guide is work on the recent fowls of Hawaii that shows that another wave of extinctions of endemic birds occurred at about the same time as the arrival of Polynesian man (c400 ad); before that, the avifauna of the Hawaiian Islands must have made it one of the ornithological paradises.

The guide is beautifully illustrated by H. Douglas Pratt, and covers, by island group, all the birds, including the seabirds and the introduced species. That occurs in this wide area, somewhat optimistically, a number of extinct species are also illustrated. The text contains useful material in addition to that standard in field guides, such as the dates when intro-

ductions arrived and the changes in their numbers since then. It is a must for any traveller to the region.

Seabirds of the World is an example of a more recent development in field guides; books that deal solely with a whole family or group of families of birds. This work deals only with those species likely to be seen at sea. Without in any way wishing to be critical of the quality of these works, I find the philosophy behind them illogical. When I go to a particular area of the world, I want a book that covers all the birds of the area, not just a single group or a selection of families. However, I suppose that a round-the-world sailor might find a book which covered only the seabirds useful. Obviously, also, I am in a minority, since in previous work by this author (*Seabirds: An Identification Guide*, 1983, revised edition 1985) has proved very popular. The main difference between this book and the *Identification Guide* are that it is smaller; the text is briefer and the birds are illustrated by photographs, not the author's paintings. Although much is made of having got together a set of photographs of all the seabirds of the world (not quite true, a few are paintings), I am not enthusiastic about them as a set. The prints are small (four or six to a page) and the quality varies from adequate to appalling. Unless my yacht was so heavily swamped that an extra half-kilo was critical, I would unhesitatingly take the larger work with its much more detailed and useful paintings.

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